

BLACK LIGHT / WHITENESS RESTS MY MIND

Evocations of the spiritual in the art and practice of
Ralph Hotere and Joanna Margaret Paul

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the art and practices of two Aotearoa New Zealand artists Ralph Hotere (1931-2013) and Joanna Margaret Paul (1945-2003) with a specific focus on their spiritual sensibilities, and in response to the implications involved in interdisciplinary dialogue between religion, theology and art history. Through the particularities of their respective art and practices, I argue that these artists provide ethical and religious interpretations of the relation of the divine to the world, that both disrupt problematic disembodied notions of the spiritual in art and hinder any single theological interpretation of their contributions. Their religiously understated practices evoke theopoetic expressions for a method of theology *as* art.

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PUBLICATIONS

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Joanna Osborne, “Encountering the Song of Spring in Ralph Hotere and Cilla McQueen’s *Song of Solomon*,” *The Bible and Critical Theory*, Vol II, No I (2015): 55-65.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines contributions of the artists, Ralph Hotere and Joanna Margaret Paul, to definitions of the spiritual in art, with consideration of interdisciplinary concerns between religion, theology and the arts.¹ Reflection on the contours of interdisciplinary discussion between religion, theology and the arts first provides insight into the complexities and inherent assumptions involved in the engagement between disciplines. Two close readings of the spiritual sensibilities of Hotere and Paul follow in response to these concerns. Through examining the visual and literary worlds of Hotere and Paul I read their unique iterations of the spiritual in art as theopoetic expressions of lived experience. Hotere and Paul are inheritors of modernism in a postcolonial context. They both provide ways of reading modernist iterations of the spiritual in art yet offer ways of conceiving this tradition through radically relational paradigms. I consider how their contributions present a way of reading relations between religion and art theopoetically.

As a research departure point I review a range of existing interdisciplinary approaches at the nexus of religion and the arts and consider an appropriate methodology that maintains a self-critical sense of balance between disciplines. I address the broader character of interdisciplinarity through affirming a general hermeneutical principle. My decision to explore the particularities of two artists governs the shape of the interdisciplinary endeavour. Both studies work as examples of an interdisciplinary approach, and in turn, highlight implications that pertain to the wider discussion.

The practices and art of Hotere and Paul place the art historical context of this study within the purview of late modernism and early postmodernism. Hotere and Paul are not contrasting case studies, but they do present alternative approaches to the spiritual in art,

¹ The title of this thesis BLACK LIGHT / WHITENESS RESTS MY MIND is in reference to a Hotere exhibition and a poem by Paul. The exhibition *Ralph Hotere: Black Light. Major Works Including Collaborations with Bill Culbert* was produced in a partnership between The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. It was curated by Gwynneth Porter, John Walsh and Ian Wedde. Dunedin Public Art Gallery, March-May 2000; Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, June-August 2000; The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, October 2000-February 2001. The poem by Paul is from "The Silence of Trees" in *Like Love Poems*, 87. The whole poem can also be found in "your name," a book of poems and photos. According to Hall, in this collection "the stanzas [are] in the reverse order, [with] a note on the back inside page: 'MALADY – MELODY – THRENODY'." Hall, *Like Love Poems*, 131. Through these words there is a reference to Bill Manhire's *Malady* (1970), that included illustrations by Hotere, who also produced a series of works in response to Manhire's poetry.

drawing upon modernist undercurrents and approaching postmodern and poststructural turns in the discourse of art history. Both artists disrupt modernist notions of the spiritual in art as a flight towards the Absolute, defining a sense of divine transcendence through affirming immanence in different ways. I consider their contributions in terms of a theological anthropology, located in their respective orientations of being in the world that define a sense of the spiritual in art as deeply relational and material. The expressions of apophaticism in their work, when approached in detail, also redefine the way art world apophaticism is read as disembodied and void of language. The spiritual in art is still referenced by a modernist formula but is framed differently, thus demonstrating alternative and particular readings of the modernist heritage of the spiritual in art as generalised disembodied immateriality. Paul is positioned in relation to a trajectory of cultural feminism in art that deconstructed the notion of the artist as genius; an idea of the artist that could be said to be epitomised in the modernist abstraction that Hotere inherited. Both artists are placed within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. The interpretive task of reading their work involves the inclusion and contrast of traditions of mysticism in modern art, alongside a materially and relationally defined sense of lived experience – in other words the connection between art and life – as well as the embodied experience of viewer and artist.

Contents and structure

This thesis is divided into two parts. Part one considers the wider context of the task: the exchange between religion and art history from the respective viewpoints of art historians, religion scholars and theologians. Part two explores the religious sensibilities evident in Hotere's and Paul's respective works and practices.

Part 1: Methodology at the intersection of religion and the arts

I examine interdisciplinary concerns between theology, religion and the arts as an essential backdrop to any study between religion and the arts. I review three pools of scholarship and their distinct approaches to the relation between religion and the arts: namely, art history, religion and theology. The methodologies employed by scholars in these three spheres are inevitably grounded within their respective disciplines. I

examine a range of distinctive disciplinary methodologies with a view to developing an approach for the two artist studies.

I begin by outlining the broad contours of discussion on the relation between art and religion to present some of the issues that pertain to the field in general and highlight some common areas of concern for any engagement in the topic. I identify a general 'cognitive dissonance' in the art world on the relation of art and religion: religious art is problematic; there is a strong tradition of the spiritual in art; and the language often employed by art historians to explore this tradition is often too vague. The overcoming of secular assumptions and the provision of specific language for spiritual concepts in art emerge as two prevailing issues.

A survey of the field of art and religion reveals multiple approaches and sites for engagement. Methodological approaches are usually, and not surprisingly, shaped by the disciplines in which the scholars are trained. Art history scholars generally affirm an object focussed study, religion scholars might be more context or practice orientated, and theologians are usually predominantly engaged with theological tradition.

I then review the perspectives of scholars engaged in interdisciplinary dialogue between religion and the arts. Some shared concerns and approaches emerge. The need to resituate a critical study of religion within the discourse of art history emerges as a significant concern. In turn, the need to overcome secular assumptions and provide theologically and religious specific language emerges as part of this concern.

Enchantment narratives provide an entry point. I affirm the need for a self-critical methodology in which the significance of the theological contributions and histories implicit in art history is given appropriate attention, while not allowing those theological concerns to become wholly determinative hermeneutical paradigms. The viewer's encounter with art must also be attended to, along with the situated practices of artists. A revision of generalised and disembodied notions of the spiritual in art is countered through an approach to the discussion through material culture.

Interdisciplinarity engagement is required to be hermeneutical.

In light of my findings and in contrast with abstract theoretical approaches, this study adopts a hermeneutical approach which focuses on the art and practice of selected artists. This approach provides an ethical orientation that is self-critical and values difference through affirming an inherent nature of art and religion as dialogical. I also consider the practices of Hotere and Paul as being hermeneutical or dialogical engagements with the world. As poetic and visual expressions of a spiritual worldview, their work offers unique contributions to theology. I affirm their practices as forms of theopoetic language that privilege the site of lived experience as a departure point for both reading-along-with their specific shaping of the spiritual in art, and an implicit contribution to the wider field of religion and the arts.

Theopoetics can be defined as a method for doing theology that is critical of systematic and doctrinal traditions. It can be defined as doxological in the sense that it is grounded in creative practice and lived spiritual experience. Reading Hotere and Paul's art as theopoetic expressions provides a way of conceiving their contributions as theological explorations and sites of divine relationality. Rather than reading their work as contributing to wider theological discourse, or drawing upon doctrine to explain their work, art is considered as a location for doing theology in relation to spirituality.

Part 2: Artist studies

Through literature reviews dealing with Hotere's and Paul's respective positions within New Zealand art history, I first outline the religious and spiritual concerns of their work and then undertake readings of their sensibilities and examine the scope of their spiritual and religious concerns. In the study of Hotere, I predominantly review secondary literature that highlights the Catholic, and Modern nexus that defines his spiritual sensibility. In Paul's writings on her practice I note an implicit theological phenomenology, and a type of sacramental theology (following her own definition) that she makes in connection with literature and the arts.

I approach each study according to the primary evidence provided. In the Hotere study, I work from the platform of secondary literature and the shape of his study is categorical. I explore different aspects of Hotere's spiritual sensibility in turn, before

drawing the interpretive strands together. In the Paul study, I work from the platform of both secondary literature and her own reflections on her practice. I adopt a more integrated approach to Paul, reading the key interpretive categories of her spiritual sensibility in overarching chapters.

Both artists were forerunners in their fields and both emerged from the context of a modern paradigm for art practice but also moved beyond it. Their work and practice exhibit thematic undercurrents that can be interpreted as disrupting modernist hegemony. The cultural and political movements of the late 1960s and 1970s also provide an historical backdrop for their contributions. The women's movement serves as an implicit historic backdrop for Paul, while the anti-apartheid movement was an explicit concern of Hotere's. Both artists concerned themselves with environmental activism. They both drew inspiration from international trends in art and have been inspirational figures for the following generation of artists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Traces of a larger heritage in modern art can be seen in the work of Paul and Hotere. Implicit and explicit contemporary ecological, political and theoretical gestures are also apparent in their respective oeuvres. Hotere's bicultural, political and ecological focus, along with his literary sensibility, frames the question of the spiritual in his work in a rich and specific way. Paul's literary sensibility draws upon a variety of textual traditions including Romanticism, modern philosophy, ecology and feminism. The influence of artists concerned with interior spaces and still life is also evident in her work.

My position and the context of this study

I position myself as a writer/artist/musician born in a small South Island town on the East coast of Aotearoa New Zealand. My undergraduate background was in fine arts, where I developed a practice through the medium of photography and sculpture. I am now a practising musician within a collaborative ensemble that works with improvisational experimental music and sound art. My choice of artists for this project reflects my indebtedness to the women's art movement and my location in a post-colonial country. Hotere and Paul are also appropriate options for artist studies on

account of the clear (yet understated) connections to religious content in their work which offers a clear path for theological readings.

The respective oeuvres of Hotere and Paul are not overtly religious. These artists invite consideration instead of a much less explicit exploration of spiritual or religious concerns. While Hotere's work contains iconographic motifs that connect his work to Christian tradition, and Paul made a small number of liturgical pieces in her lifetime, their contributions as a whole were not unambiguously expressive of particular religious themes or content.

To support a thorough analysis of the spiritual and religious sensibilities of the art and practice of Hotere and Paul, my allegiance in this project is primarily to the artists and I suspend allegiance to any particular theological tradition. This thesis does not seek to propose or advance any particular theology. Rather, theological interpretation of the content of Hotere's and Paul's art elicits a range of responses. My interest in theological engagement with art comes in the wake of an observation for the need of more nuanced and specific language to adequately account for spiritual and religious concerns in art.

Aim of thesis

The field I range over in the first part of this dissertation is broad and multidisciplinary. It is well covered ground, with massive reservoirs of scholarship. But the reiterative endeavour of outlining this material is undertaken in order to support a thoroughgoing study of two artists who have not been examined in an interdisciplinary context before. The aim of this thesis is to examine the spiritual and theological resonances in the art and practice of Hotere and Paul and to consider how their contributions might shape our understandings of the spiritual in art.

This enquiry also involves a consideration of disciplinarity. Categorical differences seem to emerge as problematic points of negotiation within the task of reading and interpreting art in relation to religion and theology. In response to this, I conduct close readings of Hotere's and Paul's spiritual sensibilities, and explore the potential for religious and theological interpretation of their work. I am drawn to the idea of a theopoetics of everyday life as a nexus for the art historical, theological, and religious

strands examined here. I adopt a process of reading along with Hotere and Paul to highlight the way their art practices can be defined as theopoetic practices. I argue that an interpretation of Hotere's and Paul's contributions conform to accepted definitions of this term as it emerged in late modern theological circles as an engagement between theology and culture in resistance to a perceived restrictive definition of theology. More directly, this term emerges as a useful way of categorising interdisciplinary engagement with Hotere's and Paul's practices. In a broader sense, I highlight how their practices have a bearing on generalised understandings of the spiritual in art.

Because Hotere and Paul are artists of note, the exploration of the spiritual concerns in Hotere's and Paul's art and practice will add, I hope, to their art historical reception. At the time of writing, a renewed interest in Paul's work has emerged on the dealer gallery scene and her work has gained international interest, attested by the contribution of her early film-making to the 2015 London Film Festival. It could be argued that her position within Aotearoa New Zealand art history is becoming more visible as she is celebrated as a practitioner who was ahead of her time. By contrast, Hotere's exceptional contribution as a significant artist of Māori descent has been acknowledged and examined for several decades.

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER ONE

Interdisciplinarity: religion and the arts

Introduction

The relations between art, theology and religion are multifarious as a field of study. Scholars with an interest in the engagement between art and religion are usually situated within a chosen discipline, preferring the methodological norms in which they were trained. This means that the methodological orientation of each field – art history, religion, or theology – have vast discrepancies. When it comes to the field of theology, the subject becomes more divisive as scholars usually situate themselves within traditions of theology with denominational ties.

In this chapter I acknowledge the academic context of a discussion between religion, theology and art as it has proceeded thus far in the literature. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the potential for common ground between disciplines, especially regarding the role theology might take within a wider interdisciplinary project. The literature I have reviewed overall, has its locus in discussions specifically engaged with the topic of the relation between religion and art or theology and aesthetics. This chapter prepares the ground towards outlining the way in which I intend to connect two artist studies to the wider discipline: at the nexus of theology, religion and arts.

My initial methodological concern is with the hermeneutical task: the method of interpretation or translation involved in avoiding the imposition of a theological programme upon an object or image that might go against the intention of the artist or the integrity of the artwork. Theological engagement with the arts does not often move outside the schools of theology. This is fair enough for the task of the theologian, but it may also contribute to the view that theologians working in dialogue with the arts have privileged a theological agenda. Theologians have been accused of drawing upon the arts for theological instrumentality or illustration, that has a reductive effect on the part of art criticism. However, most scholars working within the domain of theological aesthetics are working in the mode of theology. They are not engaged with art history or criticism, so I have no issue regarding their *modus operandi*. My review of theological

contributions in this study has its focus on recent contributions that tend to take art seriously, which also dampens the legitimacy of this concern.

In this chapter I explore an ethics of approach, or methodology, before embarking upon an investigation of the religious and spiritual sensibilities in the art and practice of Ralph Hotere and Joanna Margaret Paul. Here I review the work of scholars at the nexus of art, religion and theology. I predominantly review literature within the English-speaking context of the discussion. First, I present an overview of methods employed within respective traditions, foregrounding what I see as essential elements of effective interdisciplinary, or multidisciplinary engagements. I also explore the assumptions that come with the methods employed. The point of clarifying these assumptions for my studies, is to identify the disciplinary categories involved and general orientations of scholarship within each field. Finally, some comment on ethical considerations of working in a multidisciplinary vein is also warranted.

In conclusion, this project proposes an heuristic approach. This means not only adjusting interpretive lenses to match given works of art but allowing room for the involvement of different disciplinary assumptions and scholarly engagements to meet. I affirm the historical context of the artists and art under investigation. My approach is hermeneutical and dialogic, as I value the viewer's encounter with the work in question as a methodological premise.

Defining the field: art history, religion, theology

Religious content in the art world is a contentious subject. Co-editor of *Frieze* Magazine Dan Fox outlines the general climate, and provides a synopsis of what tends to be acceptable content for the art world:

religious art...is taboo. [But] if we're talking art about religion, that's totally kosher: video or photographic documentaries that wear the vestments of anthropology and the social sciences, for instance, or any number of recent pieces that turn their eye on fringe cults or Modernist dalliances with spiritualism. Blessed too are 'visionary' or 'outsider' artists, patronized for their obsessive cosmologies and prophecies...[And] if you've followed the regular

paths of art-school ordination, then a little dusting of Buddhism or Eastern philosophy is perfectly acceptable...¹

Fox provides some explanations for the resistance or distaste for religious expression in art criticism. He believes that twentieth century “art aligned itself with progressive, rational secularity and radical subjectivity” [and] “the ideas that have fed into art come from modern philosophy, liberal or radical politics, sociology and pop culture rather than theology.”² Other reasons for contention, he suggests, relate to common assumptions that institutional religion is associated with intolerant social views, regarding women or sexuality for example, and is considered the cause of political conflict and violence in certain sectors of the globe.

Fox identifies a “cognitive dissonance” on the topic of religion within the art world.³ Referring to Simon Critchley’s statement that art “combines ‘an uneasy godlessness with a religious memory,’” Fox believes that within the production of meaning is an implicit belief based structure: “art involves a conceptual investment in objects and images just as any religion invests significance in its icons and the ritual use of objects.”⁴ Fox also identifies the use of immaterial terms: “‘spiritual’, ‘transcendent’, ‘meditative’, and ‘sublime,’” within the critical language of reviews or exhibition statements.⁵ He notes the “fuzzy” and “lazily unspecific” use of these terms.⁶ At the same time he believes that this choice of language is “not exactly speaking to the rationalist or atheist within us.”⁷ Fox concludes by questioning why a vague appeal to the “spiritual” is acceptable, “as if being ‘spiritual’ is somehow free of ideological baggage, or more to the point, not as capable of exerting control over people as organized religions are.”⁸ I take Fox’s word for it: that the contemporary environment is

¹ Dan Fox, “Believe it or Not,” *Frieze* 135 (November-December, 2010) <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/believe-it-or-not/> (29 October 2013).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

somewhat closed to theological contribution. There is a dissonance here, which others, like James Elkins, have also identified.

Elkins is often cited as stating the incompatibility of religion and art but his contributions to the discussion have in equal part opened productive spaces of dialogue. For Elkins, “[modern] spirituality and contemporary art are rum companions: either the art is loose and unambitious, or the religious is one-dimensional and unpersuasive,”⁹ yet he encourages a continued attempt at exchange.¹⁰ He identifies religious content within modern and postmodern discourse on art as an “open secret” but claims that it remains “a secret because it is so seldom analysed, and when it is analysed something in the writing is ruined.”¹¹ Elkins appears to be referring to the importance of retaining the notion of mystery that inherently characterises spirituality and the intention of an artist working in this vein. For Elkins the language of theology is too explicit. He continues:

The buried spiritual content of modern and postmodern art may be the great unexplored subject in contemporary art history. Still, any book devoted to the subject is bound to fail because it would have to spell out so many things that the artists do not even tell themselves.¹²

A residual religious language can be found within art criticism. Like Fox, Elkins has also expressed an interest in terms appropriated from religious tradition that circulate through art criticism – words like aura, empathy, the sublime, and the uncanny.¹³ He questions how these terms translate between contexts. According to Elkins, several historical trajectories of religious and philosophical modern thought have manifested in “crypto-religious” or “quasi-religious” terminology in art history.¹⁴ He notes the way

⁹ James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 115.

¹⁰ Ibid., 116.

¹¹ Elkins, “Iconoclasm and the Sublime: Two Implicit Religious Discourses in Art History,” in *Idol Anxiety*, ed. Josh Ellenberg and Aaron Tugendhaft (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 148.

¹² Elkins, *What Painting Is: How to Think about Using the Language of Alchemy* (New York & London: Routledge, 1999), 75.

¹³ Elkins, *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 180. Other terms Elkins refers to include iconoclasm, idolatry, and iconophilia and so on; the “ultra-avant-garde” tendency of modernism; and materiality. Elkins, “Iconoclasm and the Sublime,” 134.

¹⁴ Elkins, “Iconoclasm and the Sublime,” 136.

“concepts and discourses in art history...function as versions of concepts and discourses that belong to religion...”¹⁵ Regarding one of the more prominent and widely used terms, the sublime, Elkins concludes that it has been “asked to do too much work for too many reasons,” and he pleads for a renewed use of words that say what they mean.¹⁶ The philosophical and religious freight attached to the sublime, and the way this word has been downgraded to a common term and often misused as a way to describe the power of art, gives rise to Elkins’s abandonment of any contemporary application of the term.

The dissonance that shrouds religious discourse in the arts is perhaps best represented in the publication of David Morgan and Elkins’s, *Re-Enchantment*, as a collective examination of the relationship between religion and art in a contemporary context.¹⁷ As part of Elkins’s Seminar series, the book contains a transcription of a round table, accompanied by introductory and supportive essays and postscript responses from a wide range of scholars. The discussion itself is rather fractious (admittedly, a characteristic of general discussion) yet it is representative of the conversation between religion and art at large and teases out some of the central issues. Echoing Fox’s reading, one reason general religious or spiritual topics get shut down within the art world is because they are enclosed within a secular definition of religion in circulation within a closed segment of modernity.¹⁸

Fox and Elkins present an aspect of the relation between religion and art in contemporary scholarship. But the broader historical contours of the relation between art and religion, in the Western and modern world, is far reaching. Contemporary scholarship, however fractious, offers approaches to the relation between art and religion beyond the contentious situation that Elkins describes.

¹⁵ Ibid., 134. Elkins provides an overview of the distinct discourses of the sublime and iconoclasm together, stating the usefulness of reading them this way for their significant positions within recent art historical and theoretical discourse.

¹⁶ Ibid., 150. See also William Desmond, *Art, Origins, Otherness: Between Philosophy and Art*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003).

¹⁷ James Elkins and David Morgan, *Re-Enchantment* (New York; London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁸ See Charles Pickstone, Review of *Re-Enchantment* eds., James Elkins and David Morgan, in *Art and Christianity* 58 (Summer 2009): 58-59.

David Morgan's historiography provides a useful point of departure, as he maps the historical trajectory of philosophical, art historical, theological and anthropological exchanges between art and religion. For Morgan, "art and religion" as a field, identifies a situation of scholarship and he suggests an "interdisciplinary crossroads" as a fruitful description for the current situation regarding the study of religion and the arts.¹⁹ Frank Burch Brown notes the way the "present geography of religion and the arts" might be described as maintaining a "sense of opening and flux" rather than "the fixed areas and boundaries" of a map.²⁰

Morgan categorises five approaches to defining a field of art and religion. First, what he calls an "evolutionary approach" addresses the development of human consciousness as expressed in the relation between art and religion, where "art is almost always subordinated to religion, as a means to an end."²¹ Secondly, a "cognitive approach" places an emphasis on perception of the sacred through art and religion. In this approach art adopts a hermeneutical role for reading cultural or religious histories.²² Thirdly, "The Visual (and material) culture approach" with a similar methodology to that of the cognitive approach, emphasises the reception of art historical artifacts within religious practices and an "understanding the world-building activity of imagery and visual practice."²³ Fourthly, "The traditional art historical approach" is concerned with iconography, subject, style, content and so on.²⁴ Fifthly, "The phenomenological approach" is focused on the "consciousness" of holiness in art, and is related to notions of affect.²⁵ Morgan cites Gerardus van der Leew's contribution as an example of this approach. For van der Leew the holy can manifest through art, not merely be illustrated by art. Following Rudolf Otto's concept of the "wholly other," this approach is

¹⁹ David Morgan, "Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion," in *Reluctant Partners: Art and Theology in Dialogue*, ed. Ena Giurescu Heller (New York: The Gallery at the American Bible Society, 2004), 18.

²⁰ Frank Burch Brown, "Mapping the Terrain of Religion and the Arts," in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, ed. Frank Burch Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13.

²¹ Morgan, "Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion," 19.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁴ Morgan cites Jane Dillenberger's adoption of Erwin Panofsky's methodology, and John Dixon, who contributed to broadening this approach to account for theoretical considerations. *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

associated with the tradition of Schleiermacher's German Romanticism.²⁶ But, as Morgan states, van der Leew's systematic programme for the arts did not fully account for "the particularities that engage the historian and ethnographer."²⁷

Morgan then outlines three categories into which these studies fall: object centred, practice centred, or related to theology and aesthetics. These categories are usually informed by the orientation of the scholar. 'Art history' is generally object centred; the 'visual culture approach' and 'cognitive approach' are practice centred; and the 'evolutionary approach' and 'phenomenological approach' involve the history of theology and aesthetics. For Morgan, object-centred studies can be grouped as focussing on "sacred objects or spaces" within a religious context, or a consideration of the "material culture of a civil religion," or the "material culture of spirituality, hermeticism, mysticism" and so on.²⁸ Practice-centred studies consist of a "visual or material cultural approach," differentiated from art history, which focuses on "the cognitive and behavioural frameworks" of "visual practices" situated within the study of religious or cultural contexts.²⁹ Religious aesthetics is the final category which is not concerned with art history or visual practice of religion directly, but considers "the theological implications of art or the aesthetic significance of religion."³⁰ This category is primarily theological or philosophical, and as Morgan states, does not spend much time "analyzing actual works of art."³¹

Complementing Morgan's schematic, art historian James Romaine also observes the development of the literature on art and religion along two separate trajectories: "visual

²⁶ For Otto, the "holy" as "wholly other" (defined as "the numinous" for the purpose of delineating the idea from moral goodness) is an "object outside the self." Otto draws upon Schleiermacher, with regard to his emphasis on our experience or response to the "wholly other" as "religious emotion," which for Otto can only occur if the "wholly other" is present to the individual. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, trans. by John W. Harvey (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959), 23-25; 43. The question, for van der Leew, "is to what degree the consciousness and the realization of the holy can be art." Gerardus van der Leew, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*, trans. by David E. Green (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 7.

²⁷ Morgan, "Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion," 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

theology and religious culture.”³² In Romaine’s version of a methodology for the arts and religion, visual theology usually adopts a “content-orientated method” in line with “a content-permeated” art object.³³ Romaine describes this method as a “vertically-oriented” approach that places emphasis on the human-divine relation.³⁴ Within this orientation a hermeneutical approach is affirmed, and the work is often considered a form of “biblical exegesis.”³⁵ A “context-oriented method” on the other hand, is characteristic of the approach undertaken within the field of religious culture that affirms the place of history and theory, predominantly examining art within the context of religion.³⁶ Within this approach the work of art is considered “along a horizontally-orientated axis” that affirms “both social/personal difference and connectedness,” where the question of meaning emerges in relation to “social and cultural function.”³⁷ Romaine argues that an approach within the bounds of a “history of Christianity and the visual arts,” affirms both these methods: “art-as-visual-theology and art-as-religious-culture.”³⁸ Gaining an awareness of the shape of approaches is the beginning of any interdisciplinary project. It also provides a way of situating one’s own project within the wider literature.

The above mappings indicate that methodological orientations are basically determined by the disciplinary affiliation of individual scholars. The link between scholarly approaches to studies in religion and the arts falls upon the standpoints of individual scholars. Morgan observes that scholars tend not to be acquainted with wider literature beyond their own fields. The breadth of scholarship in general, encompasses a plethora of methodological approaches which, as Morgan states, is “differentiated by language, geography, religion, and national history, that no single scholar operates with a

³² James Romaine, “Expanding the Discourse on Christianity in the History of Art,” in *ReVisioning: Critical Methods of Seeing Christian in the History of Art*, ed. James Romaine and Linda Stratford (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8-9. Romaine names Doug Adams, Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, John Dillenberger, Jane Dillenberger, William Dyrness and Hans Rookmaaker within this purview.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

normative sense of a unified, singular field of inquiry.”³⁹ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona agrees that there is “no formal or accepted methodology” for this field of enquiry.⁴⁰ For her, scholarly expertise “shapes the lens through which” scholars “unconsciously” view the relation between religion and the arts.⁴¹ These observations indicate that projects on the relation between art and religion are rarely interdisciplinary, in the sense that equal weight is attributed to each discipline.

Mapping the terrain of disciplines helps one to see how each discipline looks in light of the other. As F. B. Brown states: religion as viewed from the perspective of the arts, and the arts as conceived from the perspective of religion, reveals the way disciplines shape one another. Within any given approach, the tension of relation between religion and art is also important. Working from the perspective of theology should not have to privilege an “aesthetically oblivious approach” as if art is in service of religion, nor should an art focused project give way to “the religiously oblivious alternative...”⁴² For Brown, “the dialectic ...between artistic expression and religious concepts is ongoing, with correction and transformation on both sides.”⁴³

The above mappings provide an awareness of useful departure points for the orientation of any project in art and religion. Specific theoretical concerns also emerge within each discipline which inform methodological orientations and assumptions and govern content and direction. What follows is an examination of some specific methodological concerns and approaches with which different scholars have engaged. I review a selection of literature within each disciplinary domain, noting the interests of scholars mainly concerned with the relation between art and religion or theology. Through this

³⁹ Morgan, “Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion,” 17-18.

⁴⁰ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, “Visual Arts as Ways of Being Religious,” in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, 222.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² F. B. Brown, “Mapping the Terrain of Religion and the Arts,” 15. This publication is a more recent resource outlining the general contours of the relation between religion and art. The Handbook itself has a particular orientation towards the relation between religion and art, placing religion first within the relation, as Brown states, with “the study of the arts is mapped onto that...” Ibid., 4. The chapters of this volume are organised as follows: Religious aesthetics; Artistic ways of Being Religious (categorised according to artistic genre); Religious Ways of Being Artistic (categorised according to religion); Issues and Themes: Art and worship; Morality and Justice; Doubt and Belief; Iconoclasm; Gender; material culture; sacred and secular in African American Music.

⁴³ Ibid., 15.

review I delineate a method of interpretation for two artist studies that draws from a crossroads of disciplinary influence.

From the perspective of art historians

In this section I consider the observations and critiques of art historians engaged in the dialogue between art and religion. These scholars delineate spaces for dialogue with religion and offer self-critical methodologies for engaging the relation between religion and art, beyond the often restricting and dominating assumptions of secular discourse in the arts. They highlight the need for critical engagement with religion in art history, noting a general lack of specific theological language in the scholarship of art historians, and a general lack of specific attention to art history in the scholarship of theologians. I conclude by highlighting the creative methodologies of two art historians who are critically engaged with theology.

Overcoming secularisation

The ‘return of religion’ in contemporary art has emerged in recent scholarly debate, and includes the concern to attend to the content of religion in critical terms. Art historian Sally Promey, writing in the context of the American art history academy, charts the impact of broader developments of discourse and academic disciplines in relation to the assumptions of secularisation theory. She considers the way religion has been treated in art history, giving particular attention to methodological and theoretical developments.

The art historical “return” to the study of religion...is not a mere recuperation but a return with a difference. It does not simply pick up a set of concerns once explored and then put aside. It involves, instead, a resituation of religion in scholarly conversation. It asks the academy to apply to religion the same degree of revision and sophistication in critical analysis, interpretation, and theorization that it has come to expect of art historical scholarship on other dimensions of political, social and cultural history.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Sally M. Promey, “The ‘Return’ of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art” in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 85, no. 3 (September 2003): 596.

The recent lessons of sociology, history and anthropology indicate both that religion is much too often and substantially present to be overlooked and that, when treated as an object of academic inquiry like any other, it is a more complicated subject than...art historians and critics have generally imagined.⁴⁵

Promey's concern with a 'resituation of religion in scholarly conversation' is pertinent, as the gap between religion and the arts within scholarly discourse is apparent. As a solution Promey advocates a visual cultural approach which proffers a broader definition of art. She explains that the term visual culture "offers an explicitly interdisciplinary approach that discourages the rigid separation or partitioning of one sort of visual experience or production from another, even one sensory experience from another..."⁴⁶ While Promey is writing in the United States, the form of secularisation that disregarded the academic study of religion or theology within the art academy might also apply to the secular situation of Aotearoa New Zealand.

What emerges here is a noticeable lack within art historical discourse that fails to attend to the content of religion. Romaine also calls attention to this lack as an entrenched view within art history. For him, the "prevailing narrative of art history is one that charts a movement from the sacred to the secular...[where] for many art historians [the] secularization of art is not only a narrative *within* the history of art; it has been the narrative *of* art history as an academic field."⁴⁷ Romaine notes a shift away from this position in recent years, and suggests that after the wake of modernism as a "paradigm of art history," a methodological openness to alternative directions emerged in the discipline.⁴⁸ He cites Suzi Gablik as a pioneering voice for the "disenchantment with modernism," and the subsequent affirmation of the notion of enchantment as the "antidote."⁴⁹ Yet issues remain, as he refers to the production of art that continues to be engaged with religious themes or content, and the lack of methodological frameworks capable of adequately accounting for this work, along with the danger of misapprehended histories, when specific content is ignored. For Romaine, inherent

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Romaine, "Expanding the Discourse on Christianity in the History of Art," 4-5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6. Romaine cites Hans Belting in reference to modernism as a paradigm of art history.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

“methodological attitudes and assumptions” in art history have a restricting capacity on the study of religion and the arts.⁵⁰ He cites Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard’s *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* as a precedent for the task of developing a self-critical approach that seeks to broaden and enrich the study of art and religion. Broude and Garrard’s critical re-examination of the discourse of art history, in both historical recoveries of the work of women artists and the re-evaluation of art historical methodologies that feminist discourse engendered, might be adopted for the discourse of religious art.

Secularist assumptions place a cloud over the rich and varied presence of religion in modern art. Linda Stratford believes that emphasis on the notion that art and theology *cannot* meet, is to the detriment of locating productive points of scholarly engagement. She writes:

an understanding of the trajectory of art history as less a history of autonomy from religion (as if the two were in competition), than a dialectical history of both continuity and rupture... Rather than treat sacred and secular distinctions in binary opposition, they may be admitted as inseparable components, each nurtured by the very structures they seek to suppress.⁵¹

For Stratford, a self-critical methodology for studies of religion in art history would attend to this dialectical history. She concludes by outlining the main considerations of scholarly engagement on the margins of art and religion: “an eye for theological relevance; [a] consideration of “affective space” without sacrificing scholarly rigor; and maintaining a religious perspective without overly inflating that perspective.”⁵² For her, a self-critical methodology first involves, “necessitating a widened awareness of what makes for sacred Christian content” to include material that “does not appear to ‘fit’ within the bounds of traditional religious discourse.”⁵³ It involves a “reconsideration of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁵¹ Linda Stratford, “Methodological Issues from the Fields of Art History, Visual Culture, and Theology,” in *ReVisioning: Critical Methods of Seeing Christian in the History of Art*, ed. James Romaine and Linda Stratford (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 40.

⁵² Ibid., 41.

⁵³ Ibid., 40.

what is considered ‘fit’ for professional discourse” by art historians and critics.⁵⁴ And finally, it involves an openness to “theological insight afforded by interdisciplinary borrowings.”⁵⁵ For Stratford, the field of art history stands above the rest when it comes to the specific investigation of works of art.⁵⁶

As one site of connection between art and religion, Stratford refers to the phenomenological approach adopted by art historians. For her, when the “linguistic turn” entered the art historical landscape, the methodological focus shifted to affirm phenomenological encounter, or the viewer’s subject/object relationship with the work. For the dialogue between art and Christianity, Stratford argues, this move opened a space to consider the correlation between religious and aesthetic experience. She cites the work of Ronald R. Bernier, who makes a connection between the tradition of negative theology and the presence of “negation” in recent continental philosophy.⁵⁷ Robert Rosenblum gets a mention, with his view of the northern Romantic tradition as a location for religious mystery, and the influence of this sensibility on twentieth century abstract artists. Donald Kuspit is cited as contributing to the interpretation of abstract art in terms of spirituality, with an emphasis on the idea of silence.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Stratford cites Shelley Perlove and Larry Silver’s work on exploring the “theological insight” of Rembrandt, through their argument that Rembrandt maintained an interest in religion, in particular with regard to biblical content of his work that made associations between New Testament content and the Hebrew bible. Ibid., 36. See Shelly Perlove and Larry Silver, *Rembrandt’s Faith: Church and Temple in the Dutch Golden Age* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009). Eleanor Heartney’s *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2004) is another example of art historical work that posits a correction to the erroneous assumption that religion is antithetical to contemporary art. Heartley argues for the presence of a Catholic sensibility in certain trends of contemporary art.

⁵⁷ Stratford, “Methodological Issues from the Fields of Art History, Visual Culture, and Theology,” 37. In a similar vein of concern, art historian Ronald R. Bernier outlines the premise of a series of contributions in a publication aimed at “[challenging] the assumed secularism of institutional art history,” and addressing “the possible re-emergence of a theological dimension to contemporary art...” Roland Bernier, “Introduction,” in *Beyond Belief: Theoaesthetics or Just Old-Time Religion?* ed. Roland Bernier (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 3. 1. Bernier cites the notion of “re-enchantment” as a term for this presence of theology, referring to Suzi Gablik for the definition in context. Bernier states that contributors were briefed on approaching the topic of art and religion that considered both the work of scholars in religion and theology (outside of the art world) and “secular theorists,” discarding the compartmentalising of a “secular left and evangelical right.” Bernier, “Introduction,” 3.

⁵⁸ See Donald Kuspit, “Concerning the Spiritual in Contemporary Art,” in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, ed. Maurice Tuchman et al., 313-25 (New York: Abbeville, 1986), in Stratford, “Methodological Issues from the Fields of Art History, Visual Culture, and Theology,” 38.

Art history and theology

Occasionally an art historian will draw significantly from theological tradition. Art historian and curator Dan Siedell's project *God in the Gallery* (2008) is one such example.⁵⁹ Siedell reflects on the formation of his career outside of debates on the "integration" of art and faith.⁶⁰ Recalling his introduction to the literature on art and religion while in the midst of his doctoral thesis, he writes of being perplexed by Rookmaker's *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (1971) and Francis Schaeffer's *Art and Bible* (1971), with their negative views of modern art that were at complete odds with his own.⁶¹ As a person with a commitment to the Christian faith, Siedell reflects on his book as an attempt to "justify [his] relationship with modern art to the church, feeling that [he] owed it to Schaeffer, Rookmaaker, Wolterstorff, Seerveld, and others..."⁶² His intention, in response to these writers, was to state that "the problem was not with modern art, but the kind of Christianity that was brought to bear on it."⁶³ So he offers an alternative position drawing on theological tradition acknowledging the lineage of Nicaea II, towards considering a form of "material spirituality" with the help of art critics,⁶⁴ Radical Orthodoxy theologians and notions of sacramentality. Siedell's thesis is commendable on several fronts. It is a synthesis that picks up on several concepts and contemporary theoretical and theological conversations. In light of the comments of writers who have maintained a critical distance from his specific theological choices, Siedell provides an interesting response, not necessarily to them, as he goes on to state, "it did not matter what theological tradition I was accessing. In the end, *I was trying to justify modern art to myself.*"⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Daniel A. Siedell, *God in the Gallery: A Christian Embrace of Modern Art* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁶⁰ Siedell is a representative scholar from the art historical side of the fence, with a heavy interest in theology. He is featured in the like of *Image Magazine* and has collaborated with William Dyrness. It is almost as if he represents the current contemporary position on the arts from within the (evangelical) church, (American context) even as he maintains a position from without.

⁶¹ Daniel A. Siedell, *Who's Afraid of Modern Art? Essays on Modern Art and Theology in Conversation* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁴ Siedell, *God in the Gallery*, 71-108. See Klaus Ottmann, *Thought Through my Eyes: Writing on Art, 1977 – 2005* (Putham, CT: Spring Publications, 2006).

⁶⁵ Siedell, *Who's Afraid of Modern Art?* 8.

Siedell is thankful for being “wonderfully unencumbered” from theological questions and religious implications in his early work and training as an art historian, specifically Christian commentary.⁶⁶ Here he clarifies his stance:

I...resist the tendency to “apply” faith to culture, to art—as if paintings, poems, theatre performances, novels, and songs don’t themselves do something to us, and do something theologically. Rather than metaphors of application, integration, and connection, I prefer the metaphor of *conversation*, which respects the agency of art and implies a much more intimate relationship.⁶⁷

The sentiment that emerges here, echoing much of the literature I have reviewed, places an emphasis on the work itself, without the need for an apologetic commentary. To work, as Siedell puts it, “as if God did not exist,” is understood not as blasphemous but emphasises a point: it is not necessary to have to offer theological accounts of artistic endeavours in and of themselves.⁶⁸ He also observes the lack of art historical rigour in Christian commentary on art. He does not specifically refer to texts here, but the likes of Rookmaaker et al. are in view. Conversely, Siedell also observes a tendency of writers on art and religion to generalise when it comes to spiritual content.⁶⁹

From a methodological standpoint, Siedell is a writer who immensely values the *encounter* between viewer and work of art. For him, the “work of art makes a claim on the viewer...”⁷⁰ and from his perspective, art historical and theological literature do not make much of this point: focusing on “the artist’s world view, his or her beliefs or the work of art’s capacity to illuminate historical context...distract us from this isolating encounter.”⁷¹ The kind of encounter that Siedell sees as being implicit in his relationship to modern art has an inherently theological tone itself.⁷² The kind of

⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., xvi.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Siedell draws on the words of Rowan Williams: “To be absorbed in the sheer otherness of any created order or beauty is to open the door to God, because it involves that basic displacement of the dominating ego without which there can be no spiritual growth.” Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1990), 213, in Ibid., 7.

encounter that happens in the presence of art, Siedell concludes, contributes to a definition of faith in an ethical imperative that puts first the primacy of the other:

An encounter with a painting hanging on the wall of a museum is an aesthetic reminder of our receptivity, passivity, and responsibility, activating that theological reality in which you and I stand before the face of another, whether it is our neighbour, ourselves, or God.⁷³

Siedell moves toward debunking the notion of a ‘Christian’ artist or critic. He also upholds the significance of an account of art on its own terms. The visual “existence” of art cannot be “reduced” to the verbal.⁷⁴ While the visual trumps the verbal, the role of the verbal is to “*expand* the experiential space that allows the painting to address the viewer.”⁷⁵ Essentially, in writing on art within the domain of religion, the work of art takes precedence, and any “pretence” the writer might want to maintain, should be discarded.⁷⁶

From a similar standpoint to Siedell, art critic Jonathan Anderson outlines the premise for a theological art criticism. Anderson’s overview is encouraging in the sense that it outlines the legitimacy of a project that acknowledges the problematic political tendencies associated with interdisciplinary engagement between theology and contemporary art. He notes that much conversation between theology and the arts has tended to be a theological aesthetics or a theology of art, which has involved an approach that places emphasis on Christian doctrinal perspectives that are applied to art. On the whole, he believes theological investigations of art do not effectively engage with art theory in general and are thereby not fully equipped to contribute to contemporary art criticism.⁷⁷ Religion scholarship, on the other hand, is more theoretically focused in methodology and therefore potentially more available for

⁷³ Siedell, *Who’s Afraid of Modern Art?* 11.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁷⁷ Jonathan A. Anderson, “The (In)visibility of Theology in Contemporary Art Criticism,” in *Christian Scholarship in the Twenty-First Century: Prospects and Perils*, ed. Thomas M. Crisp, Steve L. Porter and Gregg A. Ten Elshof (Grand Rapids, MA / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 74.

making contributions in a contemporary art critical environment.⁷⁸ Anderson also notes the importance of avoiding reductionisms and resisting closures of meaning within the theological interpretive approach. He affirms the importance of a hermeneutical approach. The importance of “hermeneutic circling,” where “artworks and our interpretive frameworks mutually challenge and shape one another.”⁷⁹

Locating an appropriate interpretive entrance for a theological contribution to the arts, Anderson outlines a basic definition of theology as “the question of the relations of human persons, societies, and materiality itself to the presence or absence of God (or gods).”⁸⁰ Anderson also maintains that this question remains open as an “interpretive horizon” as there is no necessary requirement to provide an answer.⁸¹ For Anderson, a theological contribution should both “open” and “enrich” interpretations, where appropriate and needed, and provide an interpretation for works of art that could be understood better through this lens.⁸² A theological approach would obviously not be exhaustive, but in collaboration and with respect to established critical interpretive methodologies within art history, “would instead aim at sensitively and creatively opening up what is already going on in an artwork from a theological frame of reference...”⁸³ Anderson’s theological art criticism has the following goals: first it is

primarily concerned with providing careful, thick interpretations of contemporary artworks in ways that 2) compellingly account for and resonate within the existing contemporary art discourse, in the very act of 3) bringing theological questions, concerns, and positions to bear in its strivings to understand the work.⁸⁴

Towards this end Anderson outlines three areas of artistic concern or content that would be relevant to theological enquiry: the work contains clear iconographical references or content; the artist maintains an association with a religious faith; or the subject matter or

⁷⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 74-75.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 67.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 68.

⁸³ Ibid., 72.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 75.

topic that the artist addresses, works through questions that theological tradition is invested in addressing, “(e.g., the human condition, the problem of suffering, and so on).”⁸⁵ The question of the authorial or artistic intention is brought up as an issue that should not have any strict bearing on the theological interpretation. Instead, he affirms a hermeneutical approach that has the mobility to position itself behind, within or in front of the object of enquiry.⁸⁶

Anderson affirms the necessity of creative methodologies. The form of theological art criticism must be “agile and *improvisational*,” in its approach.⁸⁷ His methodological model of improvisation includes the idea of a methodological “*posture* (posture determines one’s ‘field of vision’ and potential ‘range of motion’)” and “performative *skill*” in the sense of a preparedness through being versed in necessary contemporary theoretical discourses.⁸⁸ Recent and contemporary discourse on notions of enchantment or re-enchantment provide one such opening for discussion on spiritual issues and consequently the potential for a more theological robust discussion on these terms. For Anderson

...it seems that criticism interested in re-enchantment doesn’t attain any particular interpretive grip on actual artworks until it gets religiously specific – or, more to the point, *theologically* specific: rooted in (and thus accountable to) a particular theological framework, grammar, and history.⁸⁹

Summary

The art historians discussed above have vested interests in the wider relation between religion and the arts. In overview, these scholars identify the need to address religious or spiritual concerns in art from a perspective more equipped to deal with such content. Part of this approach identifies the need to resituate the discourse of art and religion in

⁸⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁶ In a general sense, approaches to interpretation can be categorised within the constituting worlds of “behind the text” (the world of the author), “in the text” (the world of the text), or “in front of the text” (the world of the reader or audience). This rubric is originally attributed to Paul Ricoeur. For example, see Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and human science: Essays on language, action and interpretation*, ed. and trans. by J.B. Thompson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁸⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 66.

critique of the dominating secular discourse in the arts. The admission that art and religion in the modern world should be understood as a dialectical history, rather than as opposing worldviews, releases art historical discourse for more transparent investigations into the place of religion. A consensus suggests that methodological concerns tend to be more inclusive of the study of religion in the wake of secular modernity. There is an acknowledgment of the need for theologically specific language in art history, and critical engagement with the study of religion, to enrich and broaden art historical discourse. Some scholars argue that broadening studies in material or visual culture contribute to a methodological approach that is more inclusive. Others acknowledge re-enchantment narratives as a common point of reference and as a potential site for theological engagement.

The need to maintain a balance of emphasis between the contributions of each field is also flagged as important. A concern that theology or religion might dominate the conversation seems to be recurrent. Stratford's suggestions that the location of religious content in art need not be confined to the bounds of traditional iconography, and theological relevance in art need not be explicitly dogmatic, opens an area of enquiry beyond an assumed status quo. Stratford concludes that scholars working in the field of art history are better equipped to offer specific investigations of art.

Stratford and Romaine argue for a self-critical methodology, in the study of art and religion. Stratford offers three suggestions that a scholar might maintain in her approach: first, a "widened awareness" of what defines "Christian content" in the traditional sense; second, an openness to traversing "ideological boundaries"; and third, engaging with religious or theological content so that it does not overshadow the interpretation of the art.⁹⁰ The task calls for attention to "theological relevance" in art, the significance of "affective space" as part of a religious interpretation, and recommends that a critical and relevant "religious perspective" be maintained.⁹¹

Siedell's project is an example of an art historian invested in theological tradition. However, Siedell also resists the application of theology to art. The metaphor of

⁹⁰ Stratford, "Methodological Issues from the Fields of Art History, Visual Culture, and Theology," 40.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

conversation, which he prefers, suggests a more hermeneutical approach. Siedell's approach is a good example of a creative endeavour. He draws on a nexus of historical and contemporary theological tradition in order to develop a synthetic theological interpretation of art, from the perspective of an art critic. For him, the role of writing on art should serve the work, rather than the writer's agenda. Here, the viewer's experience is also a privileged methodological starting point and the work of art takes precedence as the site of enquiry. Siedell places an inherent theological importance on the viewer's encounter with a work of art as an ethical imperative in acknowledgment of otherness.

Anderson's thesis is similar, as he attempts also to orientate investigations on the relation between theology and art away from strictly theological endeavours. Anderson offers suggestions for a theological art criticism that is properly contextualised, arguing for the significance of a hermeneutical sensitivity that values a creative methodological approach. Theology and art meet in a dialogical encounter where mutual listening is paramount. He argues for a theological art criticism that is "agile and improvisational,"⁹² noting re-enchantment narratives as a potential site of engagement. What emerges as important in theological contribution is the specificity of language. Anderson presents a methodological framework with a range of implications and room to manoeuvre, essentially staking out the basics for an approach to the study of art and religion that maintains self-critical awareness of the discourses involved.

The above scholars are not representative of the broader contours of art historical method, as they specifically approach the topic of art and religion as an interdisciplinary exercise. They highlight several critical points of orientation, including gaps in this situation of scholarship. Art history, in general terms, supports an object centred study. The general directional division between a *vertically orientated*, content based *visual theology*, and a *horizontally orientated* context based *religious culture*, provides an initial categorisation for methodological approaches in general. The above scholars are representative of both spheres, angling towards locating a robust and critically aware methodology that values the integrity of the art object. The specificity of theological

⁹² Anderson, "The (In)visibility of Theology in Contemporary Art Criticism," 78.

language is important, as is the notion that the arts be conceived within the broader landscape of material culture in the study of religion.

From the perspective of religion scholars

Following the methodological orientations sketched out above, the study of art within the disciplinary context of religion is usually situated in relation to material culture. In this context, methodology takes a *context-orientated* approach in Romaine's terms, or a *practice-centred* approach in Morgan's terms.

Material religion

The materiality of religion has emerged as a theoretical theme for the study of art and religion as visual and material culture.⁹³ The more recent 'material turn' in the humanities has generated interest in specific areas of study: ritual studies, performance, and sacred space are some of the locations of study. Theoretical orientations in the study of religion and the arts usually affirm affectivity, embodiment and materiality as a way of rethinking the heritage of disembodied or intellectual renderings of the study between religion and art. In this domain the dissemination and influence of imagery is examined for the way it shapes culture.⁹⁴ "The material turn in the study of religion," as Morgan puts it, "entails the development of methods that will yield accounts of the materialization of religion."⁹⁵ Studies that are concerned with the materiality of religion in relation to the arts, entail more than a turn to the art object as a focus of study. Morgan argues, "[the] task of the so-called material turn is to explore how religions are

⁹³ See Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012). This publication addresses the relation between religion and matter that has a history of being perceived as having an inherently "antagonistic" relation. Part of that perception is blamed on Protestantism, also erroneously perceived as de-valuing matter in relation to the spiritual, or symbolic. This is a study of religious materialism within the context of how materiality was side-lined in religion. It looks at the materiality of religion, not how religion *uses* material things.

⁹⁴ For example, Stratford sites Morgan's study of Sallman's *Head of Christ*, and how it influenced the development of faith of a whole segment of Protestants in America. Stratford, "Methodological Issues from the Fields of Art History, Visual Culture, and Theology," 39.

⁹⁵ Morgan, "Materiality," *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Stausberg, Steven Engler, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 272.

material phenomena even while they are also spiritual, ethical, intellectual, metaphysical, and linguistic at the same time.”⁹⁶

At this juncture it is also worth mentioning the “relational character” of matter, which has to do with the varied conceptions of the terms matter and materiality as they depend upon relational constructs.⁹⁷ As multiple constructions of transcendence can be conceived, there are also multiple constructions of *matter*, given the multiple kinds of relations between materiality and immateriality. The genealogy of materiality stretches the span of the history of philosophy which is too wide ranging to cover for the purposes of this literature review, but Martha L. Finch outlines a suitable departure point. Finch follows Manuel A. Vásquez’s example of a “non-reductive materialist theory of religion.”⁹⁸ Within this approach Finch wants to affirm ... “hybridity, multi-directionality, and antiessentialism” that is not reductive to “totalizing explanatory schemes.”⁹⁹ She proffers an embodied approach to religion that affirms lived experience in the context of place and practice.

Also arguing for the importance of conceiving religious practice in terms of material culture, is religion scholar S. Brent Plate’s “materially grounded” aesthetics.¹⁰⁰ Plate proposes a religious aesthetics that does not start from the theological premises of “Beauty, Truth, or God,” but that will “...work from the untenable position that religious aesthetics can be materially grounded, and yet leave open some space for what can only be called the mystical.”¹⁰¹ Plate begins from a definition of aesthetics as sense perception that is individually and socially contextualised and intimately connected with

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ See Peter Pels, “The Modern Fear of Matter: Reflections on the Protestantism of Victorian Science,” in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 28.

⁹⁸ Martha L. Finch, “Rehabilitating materiality: bodies, gods, and religion” in *Religion* vol. 42, no. 4, (October 2012): 627. See Manuel A. Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁹⁹ Finch, “Rehabilitating materiality,” 627.

¹⁰⁰ S. Brent Plate, *Walter Benjamin, Religion, and Aesthetics: Rethinking Religion Through the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2005), viii. Plate engages with Walter Benjamin as a conversation partner in his review of religious aesthetics: “Although not fitting the bill of an aesthetician, Benjamin is a crucial figure here, for he retains a materialistic understanding of aesthetics by maintaining their connection to sensual perception, while also displaying the interactive relation between art and everyday life...Because Benjamin’s writings destroyed the line separating high and low art, and because he is interested in everyday social life and the creative activities found therein, he has become a foundational figure for more contemporary studies of visual and material culture.” Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., viii.

ethics. For Plate, sense perception is the basis for human engagements with the rich aesthetic, liturgical, and narrative histories of religion, and “is the fundamental nexus for understanding both religion and art, and particularly the passage between the two.”¹⁰² Viewing religious worlds other than through sacred texts or theological doctrine is not a simple alternative. Plate’s thesis is positioned outside of the theological ivory tower yet is indebted to theological and religious tradition. His definition of aesthetics in ethical and perceptual terms places emphasis on the relation of religion and art within everyday lived experience.

An emphasis on “embodied and embedded praxis” as the basis for religious experience, contributes to religion scholar Birgit Meyer’s and anthropologist Jojada Verrips’s definition of aesthetics.¹⁰³ Meyer and Verrips provide a concise overview of the conceptual history of aesthetics, and reframe the terms for productive dialogue. Through reviewing the legacy of Kantian aesthetics, they note the significance of the emergence of phenomenology, (noting the influence of Merleau-Ponty), in connection with modern art, where “*aisthetic* experience” (knowing through the body) is affirmed.¹⁰⁴ Verrips expresses surprise that the body has been overlooked regarding the spiritual in art and that the encounter is also a somatic phenomenon. He also reminds us again of Aristotle’s *aisthesis*, which included bodily sensation. For him, Baumgarten’s aesthetics of the mid-eighteenth century developed away from this Aristotelian conception, opting for the philosophy of art and science of beauty. So Verrips argues for a return to a broader definition of aesthetics that includes the whole sensitive body in relation to the world.

Methodological approaches within the field of religion and material culture also present the value of ethnographic approaches. As a qualitative research method these kinds of approaches support an embedded, holistic and context orientated reading of a cultural setting or product. Taking this frame of reference a little further, Verrips argues for an ethnographic approach to the use of language by the different disciplines involved in the

¹⁰² Ibid., 2.

¹⁰³ Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, “Aesthetics,” in *Key words in Religion, Media and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 27.

¹⁰⁴ Here Merleau-Ponty is noted as inspiring scholars to “transcend ... bodiless and dematerialized aesthetic theory in the philosophy of art.” Ibid., 23.

relation between religion and art, to facilitate a common ground of enquiry.¹⁰⁵ He describes several different ‘tribes’ within the arts. The first tribe emerged after the process of disenchantment that began in the second half of the eighteenth century: the academy and art establishment, historians, philosophers, and galleries are described by Verrips as having an exclusivist attitude towards religious art. The second tribe are scholars of visual culture: the focus is wide-ranging and open, and there is overlap with the fine arts establishment. The third tribe focuses on religious imagery from the position of the ‘outsider.’ Verrips states that the separation between non-religious modern high art and other ‘non-art’ is problematic and unhelpful. This separation presupposes secularisation. He concludes that art and religion are entangled, not mutually exclusive categories, and that a more inclusive approach is needed beyond the borders of the scholarship of the art establishment.

Overcoming secularisation

The role of affectivity within the interpretive endeavour is another site of engagement. Religion scholar Jeffrey Kosky names the importance of specific encounters with works of art as a determining point of departure. Framing his argument within the overarching modernist notion of disenchantment, he is concerned with affirming and infusing a sense of mystery in art. The emphasis is on interpretation of the ‘worlds’ and spaces (sacred or otherwise), of works of art, outside traditional religious or liturgical settings. Kosky does not have a single theological position from which he writes, but draws upon multiple cultural, theological and philosophical traditions. He focuses on site specific or land-art works, and his interpretation involves “inhabiting” and reflecting upon the work’s worlds and affects rather than critically analysing the art itself.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Jojada Verrips, “Missing Religion, Overlooking the Body,” in Elkins and Morgan, *Re-Enchantment*, 289.

¹⁰⁶ Kosky’s case studies examine the “lightening at Walter De Maria’s *Lightening Field*; clouds with Diller + Scofidio’s *Blur*; the sky and light itself in James Turrell’s art; and driftwood and melt, rivers and tides in the work of Andy Goldsworthy.” Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity – Walter De Maria, Diller + Scofidio, James Turrell, Andy Goldsworthy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), xvi.

Kosky's thesis strives to work against the grain of the "secularization-as-disenchantment" model that the above art historians also lament.¹⁰⁷ Like Promey, Kosky believes that the impact of modern disenchantment or secularisation theory on art historical discourse and the production of modern art is to blame. Religion is relegated to the personal and private lives of individual artists and spectators, while art's secular end is found in autonomous abstract and conceptual art liberated from the confines of iconography. He points out that the general tendency of scholarship in the arts proffers a widely accepted "secularization-as-disenchantment" view.¹⁰⁸ Kosky refers to James Elkins's musings on the problematic position of religion in some art historical writing. Constructive discussion on the convergence of art and religion is thwarted when "hearing anything that sounds religious or theological in the discussion of a work [is] a threat against the integrity of the art."¹⁰⁹ From another perspective, modern art has been held by conservative commentators, (Rookmaaker for example), to be symptomatic of the defeat of religion. Kosky believes that when art critics adhere to this model, they seem reluctant or unequipped to engage with the artist's intentions.

Kosky describes a twofold purpose within his thesis. By theologically engaging with secular art works which are not explicitly regarded as religious, he hopes to wrestle the definition of religion from under the grasp of modern disenchantment. At the same time, he hopes to show the fruitfulness of drawing upon the fields of religion and theology. Kosky posits that by drawing upon theological concepts and religious language, one is able to explore works of art in a more profound way, beyond the often-limited vocabulary of the art critic.¹¹⁰ He mentions James Turrell's work as a case in point. It is often cited as "mystical" or "spiritual," but the vocabulary stops there.

One such way of addressing the specificities of language for the spiritual in art, is through differentiating between broader spiritual worldviews. Philosophy of religion scholar Wessel Stoker offers an 'heuristic model' for reading the spiritual in art in

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 173.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 171.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 173.

relation to specific theological or philosophical traditions.¹¹¹ I agree with Stoker's assessment that often the term transcendence is used as a kind of nebulous overarching term to refer to spiritual concerns in art. His typology of the different forms of transcendence in art goes some way towards rectifying the generalised use of this term within art criticism. Within his model works of art are read as "open concepts" in order to differentiate between types of transcendence.¹¹² For example, he differentiates between three types of transcendence: immanent transcendence,¹¹³ radical transcendence¹¹⁴ and radical immanence.¹¹⁵ These interpretive frameworks are supported by appropriate theology and theory, as artists are assigned a category that best fits their work. His view that different categories of transcendence and immanence should be maintained, provides a greater possibility for specificity when it comes to thinking through notions of the spiritual in art. It is a rather formulaic approach, but it offers the possibility of a straightforward analysis, provided that these forms of transcendence can be identified through artists' endeavours in the first instance.

Summary

Scholars in the field of religion generally affirm an approach to the relation between art and religion within the context of material culture. Methodologies within the field of religion are supported by wider theoretical concerns within the humanities. The field of religion offers ways of negotiating the theoretical significance of materiality within the contexts and practices of religion. As a social science, ethnographic methodologies of religion place value on a holistic and contextual reading of the relation between art and religion. The need to revise a form of aesthetics that places emphasis on material and

¹¹¹ Wessel Stoker, and W.L. van der Merwe, *Looking Beyond? Shifting Views of Transcendence in Philosophy, Theology, Art, and Politics* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2012). Wessel Stoker, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: The Spiritual in the Art of Kandinsky, Rothko, Warhol, and Kiefer* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012).

¹¹² Stoker, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, 22.

¹¹³ Here both transcendence and immanence are presented as closely related; the absolute is experienced in and through earthly reality. Stoker cites Schleiermacher, Tillich, Bonhoeffer; Hegel; Prince Myshkin (Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*), Casper David Friedrich, Warhol and Kiefer, are examples from theology, philosophy, and the arts.

¹¹⁴ Here the absolute is the wholly other and thus sharply separated from our reality. Stoker cites Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Jean-Luc Marion; Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*); the work of Newman and Rothko are artistic examples.

¹¹⁵ Here the absolute is part of earthly reality. Stoker cites Greek mythology; the Pantheism of Spinoza; 'Death of God' theology (Thomas Altizer); and Kandinsky and Mondrian are examples.

embodied praxis, and a need to counter a definition of religion against secular assumptions in the arts, emerge as important considerations within this field. The specificity of religious and theological language needed for critical engagement is also important.

Stoker's thesis provides an initial framework for approaching the nuances of theological and religious language for art. An approach that prioritises the viewers' encounter with the artwork or object of study is affirmed in resistance to a process of interpretive meaning making. Kosky and Stoker posit two methodological approaches that are suitably open-ended. Kosky, like Stoker, would rather avoid adhering to a single theological position.¹¹⁶ Kosky and Stoker draw upon multiple cultural, theological and philosophical traditions to assist in "inhabiting and reflecting" upon the art works, and the "worlds" that they engender.¹¹⁷ These two models provide spaces to discuss diverse artistic works and practices.

As the art historians highlight the presence of religion against a dominant discourse of disenchantment, the material I have considered here supports a materially grounded aesthetics and an embodied sense of the spiritual, against the dominant understanding of an intellectualised or spiritualised view of religion. I have surveyed arguments that seek support from theological tradition, and value embodied perceptual sensation as a definition of aesthetics. Scholarship in the field of religion regarding matter and materiality is situated within an awareness of the wider material turn within the humanities.

¹¹⁶ Both mention Dan Siedell's recall to the Council of Nicaea II as being too limiting. Kosky differentiates his aims from Siedell's project, stating that the problem with the Siedell's thesis is his very particular call to locate a contemporary conversation of art and religion within Nicene Christianity. By contrast, Kosky does not locate his work within a single tradition. I believe the problem with Siedell's project does not lie necessarily in a confinement to Nicene Christianity, but in his cursory appraisal of the relevant theology involved. Stoker believes this approach "...does not do enough justice to the distinct character of the spiritual image in secular art in distinction from art in a religious community." Stoker, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, 196.

¹¹⁷ Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, 84.

From the perspective of theologians

The primary question I ask of the literature in this section, is how theologians have treated the arts. I focus on work done in recent years, which largely consists of synthetic approaches that emerged in the 1980s. Many scholars in this field review the work of previous major twentieth-century theologians who maintained interests in the arts. This review is not an exhaustive selection but thematically orientated. Its purpose is to contribute to the process of delineating an appropriate methodology for my own study.

Theologians writing on theological aesthetics have various goals. The two main orientations of theological aesthetics differentiate between a theology that values the place of an aesthetics or poetics for its own means and ends, and a theology that maintains a hermeneutical appreciation of the arts. As a general admission, I explicitly intend to avoid a theology of art, but to instead locate varied theological points of reference that emerge from the art. I review both Catholic and Protestant approaches to theological aesthetics, representative of varying denominational doctrinal differences within Christian tradition. It is not my concern to provide a systematic reconciliation between traditions or ideas. Maintaining instead the differences and complementary relations between traditions is important for this project. I intend to foster an environment where alternative ways of reading theology within the same artist study can emerge and coexist, while also taking care to avoid subsuming disparate theological traditions, schools or sensibilities under one umbrella.

Theological contributions will be considered for the way theologians position themselves in relation to art history and the arts. Discovering methodological potential for theological aesthetics outside the domains of a strictly theological arena is the main purpose of this section. Towards this end, I consider theological contributions that have broad interpretive horizons.

Theological aesthetics: for the revelation of the divine

As an enquiry within theology, theological aesthetics can be defined as a “theory of knowledge through sensation.”¹¹⁸ As a form of sensed participation, aesthetics elicits ways of knowing through things like the physical senses, experience, memory, intuition, feelings. In basic categories, religious or theological aesthetics involves the question of aesthetics (broadly defined to include the study of “art, symbol, feeling, beauty, taste, imagination, and perception”) in relation to “God, revelation, and the sacred.”¹¹⁹ Catholic theologian Richard Viladesau provides an overview of divergent approaches within theological aesthetics.¹²⁰ He divides aesthetics into two main considerations: that of “aesthetics as practice or as art” and “aesthetics as theory,” which becomes “religious aesthetics” if it is either grounded in a religious community, or related to the sacred in a general sense.¹²¹ It could be said that communities of faith all practice some form of religious aesthetics.¹²² For Viladesau, Christian theology and practices of Christian communities reflect an involvement in theological aesthetics, explicitly through “artistic genres and forms that developed over the centuries” and implicitly, within “the development of certain artistic styles that are intimately connected with the religious consciousness and feeling of particular eras.”¹²³ (Viladesau cites “modern abstract art” as one example: “rejecting materialism and attempting to connect directly with ideal spiritual forms.”)¹²⁴ In contrast to religious aesthetics, theological aesthetics has its locus mainly in the Christian tradition of “speaking about God,”¹²⁵ which is further categorised as concerning the “mediation of revelation and tradition of sensible symbols; the relation of beauty to God; [and] the theological justification of sacred art (including music).”¹²⁶ Viladesau’s focus for a theology of art places the arts at the same

¹¹⁸ Richard Viladesau, “Aesthetics and Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, 30.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹²⁰ Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). See Richard Viladesau, “Aesthetics and Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*.

¹²¹ Viladesau, “Aesthetics and Religion,” 27.

¹²² This being the primary focus of *The Handbook of Religion and the Arts*.

¹²³ Viladesau, “Aesthetics and Religion,” 28.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Viladesau categorises the task of theology that deals with question of “God, faith (or religious experience); and (in extension of the second) theology itself.” Ibid., 29.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 29-30.

level of “verbal/conceptual modes of thought” as a site for “encountering and thinking about the transcendent.”¹²⁷ In the wake of postmodernism, Viladesau notes the tendency of scholarship to either focus on “a particular tradition” or, following F. B. Brown, contribute to a universal “ecumenical” view – in Brown’s case the notion of taste is an example.¹²⁸ Viladesau suggests twenty-first century contributions of theological aesthetics might take note of liberation theologies, ecology, and religious and cultural pluralisms as sites for further work.

Viladesau observes the way the relation between art and theology goes both ways: in the sense that aesthetics can be employed for theology as an aesthetic theology, and in a narrower sense, through drawing upon theology for insights into the aspects of aesthetics. The latter mode, he categorises as perception (sensation and imagination), beauty and the study of the arts in general. Viladesau suggests different approaches to these categories in systematic, foundational and practical theology. He also acknowledges the conceptual histories of terms employed in the field, with regard to the shifting definitions between fields and or historical contexts.¹²⁹

Following Jesuit priest, philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan, Viladesau believes theology as a discipline is not “all-sufficient” and should endeavour to connect with other fields of interest.¹³⁰ Viladesau also affirms the importance of collaboration, over adoption or the “fruitless attempt to subsume” human activity into theology.¹³¹ He affirms F. B. Brown’s conception of the relation between art and religion as “complementary and dialectic.”¹³²

For Viladesau art can be a “source for theology,” in the systematic and historical forms of theology, and this source material might first be “a locus of explicitly religious (and theological) experience, expression, and discourse,” or “implicitly religious” or “susceptible to correlation with the sacred.”¹³³ Viladesau lists Hans Urs von Balthasar,

¹²⁷ Ibid., 37.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 6.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 88 in Ibid., 15.

¹³³ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 15.

Brice Lawrence, and Karl Rahner, as among those who argue for the importance of aesthetics for the task of theology. Referring to Rahner, he states “that the very heart of its method must be a ‘*reductio in mysterium*’” (a leading back into mystery).¹³⁴

Viladesau goes on to say, this “methodological principle is based on the insistence that the concern of theology can be nothing but God....Theology aims at an existential encounter with God.”¹³⁵ Thus Viladesau concludes that a “‘poetic’ element” must be implicated within the “intrinsically mystagogical...dynamism of theology.”¹³⁶

Viladesau proceeds with the intention of working in a foundational theological vein: “applying the insights of a ‘transcendental’ theology in the line of Rahner and Lonergan, to the question of the relation of the divine to human imagination, to beauty, and to art.”¹³⁷ A foundational theology supports a consideration of the experience of art in the context of experiencing divine revelation. Following Rahner and Lonergan he affirms the point that “transcendental revelation...is always categorically mediated.”¹³⁸ Here Viladesau is concerned with the way art might “embody or serve this categorical revelation of God.”¹³⁹ And this kind of function of art, for Viladesau, reflects the “‘hermeneutical’” nature of religion and theology.”¹⁴⁰

Viladesau explores the way art mediates a “general” type of revelation, in broader human experience with transcendence, before considering a “special” type of revelation within the Christian tradition.¹⁴¹ In summary, the various ways in which art relates to the sacred, are posited by Viladesau through “the transcendental horizon (*via* beauty or wonder)” in art of the everyday, the evocation of feeling, or the embodiment of religious material.¹⁴²

Viladesau also considers the way Western intellectual history, which includes theology, can be reflected in art history. For Viladesau, histories of art also contribute to an

¹³⁴ Rahner, “Reflections on Methodology in Theology,” in *TI*, vol. XI, trans. by David Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 105–110, in *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³⁵ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 13.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 181.

“understanding of theological change.”¹⁴³ He then extends this notion within his project by conceiving of works of art as theological texts. He looks at the idea of a *paradigm change* as it has been applied in science and theology, then considers the “moving ‘point of view’ in Western art” in order to find “parallel movements in philosophy and theology.”¹⁴⁴ When Viladesau comes to the contemporary situation, he mentions the characteristics of postmodern art (these being, “an awareness of historicity, situatedness, and plurality, as well as a self-conscious concern for performance”¹⁴⁵) in correlation with the characteristics of contemporary theology. On the whole, he does not adhere to this method as a blanket approach to the relation between theology and art. But he does mention the nature of theology as a task, “radically tied to its history,” which affirms this kind of approach with regard to the tracing the “continuity” or path of theology through history – a task which acknowledges the centrality of the role of hermeneutics within theology.¹⁴⁶

Theological aesthetics supports a consideration of divine revelation in art. The art of Hotere and Paul contain intimations of the spiritual in art that have their grounding in histories of modern art where questions of divine revelation coalesce with notions of aesthetic contemplation. But the analysis of divine revelation through art is not the whole theological picture. The study of Hotere and Paul requires a broadening of this interpretive horizon to make room for other modes of religious and artistic expression.

Religious aesthetics: broadening definitions

An interdisciplinary project requires that religious aesthetics be more broadly defined so that it might be open to engage with the discourses of art history. Franck Burch Brown is interested in the way aesthetics can be incorporated into theology, but his theoretical approach is one that holds religious studies, theology and art or aesthetics in dialogue. One of his concerns is the pursuit of a form of aesthetics that would best inform an

¹⁴³ Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God Through Music, Art, and Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 72.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

engagement with theology.¹⁴⁷ His position is not confined to expressions of institutional religion in art, and he writes with awareness of the need to acknowledge conceptual histories of the terms involved: “neat and precise” definitions of terms like art and religion are not feasible.¹⁴⁸ He approaches his task affirming a theological pluralism with the ultimate assumption that aesthetic experience can have a religious dimension and that religious expression can be aesthetic. A defining feature of his project rests on the revision of aesthetics to encompass a productive dialogical space.

Aware of recent movements away from the discourse of ‘purist’ aesthetics (the autonomy of the art object), Brown proposes a more flexible term ‘neo-aesthetics,’ that draws upon a widely conceived view of aesthetics that is more open to debate within other disciplinary fields. In describing his notion of neo-aesthetics, he proposes that

aesthetics might better be made broader in scope than narrower [and] should perhaps be nothing less than basic theoretical reflection regarding all aesthetic phenomena, including their modes of significant interrelation with, and mediation of, what is not inherently aesthetic: abstract ideas, useful objects, moral convictions, class conflicts, religious doctrines, and so forth.¹⁴⁹

While Brown’s definition of neo-aesthetics, being, in his words, an “... unorthodox combination of the analytical, the phenomenological, and the hermeneutical, each modified and rid of its more technical trappings,”¹⁵⁰ his focus on the definition and redefinition of the term does not take anything for granted. Brown affirms a view of aesthetics that makes room for theology and religion within the discourses of art history. His theoretical framework aims at engendering a broader scope of relation between discourses. He avoids any fully-fledged theology as he does not assert any single doctrine or system of thought. He also claims that there can be no uniform relation between aesthetics and theology, yet theology is necessary, if not “reliant” on aesthetics:

¹⁴⁷ Frank Burch Brown makes an overview of the historical and theoretical development of aesthetics and theology in his work *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), and recapitulates and develops his ideas in a later publication *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁸ Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 112.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

“...what makes a given work of art in any sense religious... requires theological reflection that is also aesthetic.”¹⁵¹ This hermeneutic goes both ways, art may reflect theology, in the sense that theological insight might be found in configurations of human activity that could not be found in conceptual language of theology.¹⁵² He writes:

...theology in its intellectual forms cannot in itself fully succeed in its goal of ‘bringing all of life and the world into relation with God’¹⁵³ and why it must exist in complementary and dialectical relation not only with praxis but also with those richly aesthetic arts that can bring these relations imaginatively to life.¹⁵⁴

Brown positions his study so that it has relevance for wider enquiries in both theology and aesthetics, and art and religion more generally. For Brown, Christian theology is considered a study of religion and he does not adhere to any specific tradition. He ranges between and upon the margins of philosophical, religious and theological views on aesthetics. His study makes a case for the need for theologians to engage with scholars of religion or philosophy, for example, in order to be exposed to and challenged by alternative critical approaches, theoretical frames of reference and useful insights.

In the spirit of interdisciplinarity, John Dillenberger is also concerned with the idea of ‘broadening horizons’ and does not adhere to a single denominational tradition.¹⁵⁵ As one of the earlier thinkers in recent scholarship on the relation between theology and the arts, Dillenberger’s work is refreshingly open (even though his concerns are directed towards art in relation to the Church). He finds a diversity of approaches within the “self-conscious preoccupation with method” that he observed theology to maintain in

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁵² Ibid., 43.

¹⁵³ Gordon Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 276, in Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 88.

¹⁵⁴ Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 88. Brown writes: “...aesthetic /artistic construals and constructions of our world(s) exist in dialogical relation to the constructs of conceptual and propositional thought.” Ibid., 100.

¹⁵⁵ John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), xi.

the mid-1980s.¹⁵⁶ Two major concerns he perceived to be relevant to his project were theological relation with the secular world and pluralism, which are perhaps still relevant today.¹⁵⁷ At the time of writing, Dillenberger referred to pluralism within the field of theology in a positive sense, as “it validates a plurality of tasks.”¹⁵⁸ His reflections on this concern anticipate the interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary task, as he goes on to state that the nature of pluralism “makes collective scholarship important; it highlights the need to learn from one another, for each of us cannot be altogether competent in all things.”¹⁵⁹ From this position he highlights the “possibility of a series of ‘As if’ theologies,” where different theological positions might shed light on the topic at hand from alternative “angles of vision – all for the explication of the variegated texture of what humanity may be in the presence of God.”¹⁶⁰

The insight I bring away from these scholars is the need to adopt a heuristic and adaptable approach to reading theology alongside art and fostering a dialogical space between disciplines. The study of aesthetics need not be the only avenue in which theology might engage with the arts. Placing theology in dialogical relation with other disciplines for ways of approaching the arts opens up a broader arena of enquiry.

Reframing a theology of art

Rather than positing a theology of art, reading works of art as sites for theological engagement emerges as another approach towards interdisciplinary engagement. George Pattison highlights a distinction between “the involvement of artists with religion” and “the involvement of theology with art.”¹⁶¹ This distinction reflects a general divide between the disciplines of art history and religion on the one hand, and theology on the other. The difference is not just between visual and the verbal modes of expression, but it includes assumptions related to content and method within the different disciplines.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 215.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 249.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ George Pattison, *Art, Faith and Modernity: Restoring the Image*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1998), xii.

Pattison's arguably pioneering contribution, *Art, Modernity and Faith* (1998), is a comprehensive account of some of the historical, philosophical and theological developments that comprise relations between art and theology. In this book he concludes by positing a theology of art, from which he later withdraws as a position perhaps too premature and definitive for an area of enquiry that has "no consensual method, nor even an agreed definition of the field."¹⁶²

Yet the kernel of Pattison's remarks on a contemporary theology in relation to the arts, follows consensus: with the affirmation of materiality in a "theology of art [that is] unashamedly sensuous..."¹⁶³ He admires Woltersorff's theological account of the arts as "located at the point where the earthliness of human existence on the one hand and the dialectic of fall-and-redemption on the other intersect."¹⁶⁴ Wolterstorff places an emphasis on a "'fittingness', that is, getting the right fit between the matter and that which is represented in it. The matter of art itself matters."¹⁶⁵ Pattison posits a theology that is grounded in the desires that "draw us towards the world, and which enable or inspire us to affirm the goodness of that world..."¹⁶⁶ He places value on "simply *seeing*," with the suggestion that a phenomenological approach respects the integrity of art.¹⁶⁷ For Pattison, the centrality of perception as a distinctive "mode of consciousness" might fit better within an embodied theology that resists intimations of the neo-platonic legacy.¹⁶⁸ For Pattison, theological engagement should be grounded in the work itself, in the sense that "...the integrity of the visual image itself is respected as the principal ground of the religious significance in art..."¹⁶⁹

In his later thinking Pattison is ambivalent about the task of formulating a theology of art and suggests a dialectical approach to theology and art – although he has always

¹⁶² Pattison, "Is the Time Right for a Theological Aesthetics?," in *Theological Aesthetics After Von Balthasar*, ed. Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 107.

¹⁶³ Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith*, 135.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 135-136.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 153.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 134.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 143-144.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 148.

stressed the dialogical nature of the interface.¹⁷⁰ Pattison is also wary of any kind of prescriptive proclamations that theology might make on the arts. He instead explores the potential of a dialectical engagement with what the events of the crucifixion and resurrection can offer conceptually.¹⁷¹ Pattison is less inclined to adhere to any ontological underpinning for the theological task: “neither art nor religion tell us how things are: they simply and supremely show us meaning, value and virtue.”¹⁷² Here Pattison argues for a phenomenological account of the human subject within the theological sphere of redemption. Traditional metaphysics is discarded for “a more dynamic, relational and historical way of looking at things” where “dualities of image and idea, natural form and transcendent truth are no longer relevant in this context.”¹⁷³

Pattison’s move away from an attempt to work through a theology of art to the delineation of a dialogical space of engagement with theology supports the trajectory of my study. His acknowledgment of an embodied and materially orientated approach to reading theology and art is also significant towards combatting disembodied notions of the spiritual in art.

Privileging the work of art

With a trend to affirm the integrity of the art under investigation, tensions remain between the need to make space for the artwork to speak, and to avoid using art for theological means, while at the same time attending to theological tradition. Subtle differences emerge: between theological examination of religious content within the art under investigation; or, theological insight that is drawn through the art under investigation; and, the consideration of art as a mode of theology.

Taylor Worley affirms a model for theological art criticism, following Hans Hüing and Graham Howes, and in light of a theological evaluation of the return of religious

¹⁷⁰ Pattison, “Is the Time Right for a Theological Aesthetics?,” 108 – 114. Pattison, *Crucifixions and Resurrections of the Image: Christian Reflections on Art and Modernity* (London: SCM Press, 2009). In the latter publication he engages with the particularities of some key modern art works: Manet’s “Dead Christ with Angels,” Anselm Kiefer, and Joseph Beuys among others.

¹⁷¹ Pattison, *Crucifixions and Resurrections of the Image: Christian Reflections on Art and Modernity* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 5.

¹⁷² Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith*, xiii.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 135.

imagery in some major modern and contemporary artists. He picks several case studies: including the crucifixion works of Francis Bacon; Damien Hirst's *memento mori*; Joseph Beuys; and the Catholic sensibilities of Robert Gober, Andres Serrano, Chris Ofili and Kiki Smith. For Worley, an engagement with theological concerns that arise from these artists, would avoid top down "theological aspirations for art" and attend to the specificity of the religious content under consideration.¹⁷⁴ In the way that art has the tendency to resist any tidy association within the norms of religions tradition, or outrightly critique the tradition that artists associate with, they are able to open up a self-critical space for theology. Howes describes this as an openness of interpretation in the form of a "self-guided religious imagination."¹⁷⁵ Worley argues that a theological reading of these artists plays a necessary part in completing their critical reception. He notes a "stubborn reluctance to engage the art critical discourse," on the part of theologians engaged in the arts.¹⁷⁶ He suggests a way forward for theology that would step outside traditional theological categories and enter into spaces that are threatening or unsettling for theology. Well-worn phrases like 'blasphemous art' or 'art as a replacement for religion' can be unhelpfully simplistic when a deeper conversation is often more nuanced and ambiguous. In many cases, nuanced theological readings of artworks would make essential contributions to their critical reception. He sees the task of evaluating the mere presence of religious imagery in modern and contemporary art as a "preliminary hurdle that must be overcome and will...prove formative for future dialogue."¹⁷⁷

Worley locates three strands of potential engagement for theology: "spiritual, relational or religious art."¹⁷⁸ He argues that religious art which contains imagery or iconography that can be connected to Christian tradition, is the more promising starting point, with the goal to examine "the unexplored category of ambiguous, complicatedly religious

¹⁷⁴ Taylor Worley, "Theology and Contemporary Visual Art: Making Dialogue Possible" (PhD Diss., St Andrews University, 2009), 97.

¹⁷⁵ Worley finds the sentiments expressed by Hans Hüing and Graham Howes helpful with regard to the varied and imaginative play that artists confront us with. In privileging an openness of interpretation over specific theological positions tied to tradition and content: a "self-guided religious imagination." Graham Howes, "Religious Art and Religious Belief," *New Blackfriars* 65, no. 769-770 (1984): 339 in *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁷⁶ Worley, "Theology and Contemporary Visual Art," 97.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

art” through specific theological reading that stems from the work itself.¹⁷⁹ It is here that he locates his thesis. ‘Relational aesthetics’ also holds promising theological implications, with Nicolas Bourriaud’s emphasis being on building meaningful human relationality. But Worley is wary of its insecure status within the contemporary cultural scene as to whether it can be a sound enough foundation for theological dialogue.¹⁸⁰ For Worley, the ‘spiritual in art,’ is a predominant category, which he does not pursue because he believes it to be an area already “so thoroughly explored,” in the wider discourse.¹⁸¹ His final reason for declining to engage with the spiritual in art follows the line of thought that as art displaces religion, it reduces the theological contribution, it “threatens to displace theology from the conversation” by imposing a narrow view of what theology can offer.¹⁸² While this field is vast, it remains the predominant site for modern art historical concern with religious and theological heritage. I think any project within the bounds of religion, theology and art must account for the tradition of the spiritual in art.

While a prevailing consensus that work conducted by theologians at the intersection of theology and the arts does not engage directly with theoretical networks of discourse within the discipline of art history, most theologians work with a commitment towards taking the arts seriously. Systematic theologian Jeremy Begbie outlines the stakes for theology at the interface between theology and the arts:

To be so insistently theological, it will be said, greatly risks compromising the integrity of the arts. Surely we must first respect the...particularities of artistic making and reception, give due space to the witness of music and painting...in their own right, and only then consider the obligations of...theology...Downloading such immense and heavy metaphysical apparatus

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 103.

¹⁸⁰ Worley draws attention to Nicolas Bourriaud’s ‘relational aesthetics’ in a comparison with Tillich’s concern for the human predicament, finding in both Tillich and Bourriaud a shared orientation of meaning that seeks to move beyond alienation and foster “renewed sociability.” Ibid., 25. He also finds a common connection through the cultural theorist Michel de Certeau in the work of both Bourriaud and Graham Ward and Philip Sheldrake. Ibid., 104. See Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture, Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

¹⁸¹ Worley, “Theology and Contemporary Visual Art,” 100.

¹⁸² Ibid., 101

before we have allowed the arts their own say, before we have respected the reality of the arts on their own ground, can only lead to distortion.¹⁸³

Begbie's methodological approach is one that explores a *theology through the arts*, with a view to commenting on what art can reveal theologically. Begbie outlines this approach as follows: "Art, I submit, is best construed as a vehicle of interaction with the world: a work of art is an object or happening *through which* we engage with the physical world we inhabit, and *through which* we converse with those communities with whom we share our lives."¹⁸⁴ For Begbie, the arts are privileged "vehicles of *discovery*."¹⁸⁵ He continues: "artistic practices (and reflection on them) have their own distinctive and indispensable role to play in what we might call the 'ecology' of theology."¹⁸⁶ The premise of Begbie's programme for a "theology through the arts," is intended to "[give] the arts space to do their own work" in relation to Scripture, and the "wealth" of tradition.¹⁸⁷ Begbie's project is inherently theological in the way that art is privileged as a text for theology. The arts, while respected, are still orientated towards the theological endeavour. Reading theology through art does however have an impact upon the theological endeavour with an acknowledgement of the exchange or transformative impact that hermeneutics elicits. For Begbie, this "means hearing 'a music that you never would have known to listen for' (Seamus Heaney). It also means benefiting from the extraordinary integrative powers of the arts, their ability to reunite

¹⁸³ Jeremy Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92–93.

¹⁸⁴ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1991), 257. Begbie's theology outlined in *Voicing Creation's Praise*, critiques the theology of Tillich and the Dutch Neo-Calvinists, Kuyper, Bavinck, Dooyeweerd, Rookmaaker and Seerveld, as the backdrop for the introduction of an Incarnational–Trinitarian framework. Begbie affirms the place of trinitarian theology, which critically resituates the development of theological aesthetics represented by these thinkers and approaches a notion of the divine that addresses the problematic of a homogenous, disembodied, non-relational notion of transcendence in art.

¹⁸⁵ Begbie, "Introduction" in *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*, ed. Jeremy Begbie (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2000), xi. The particular theological focus of this volume examines the idea of the incarnation thought the arts with the "hope to demonstrate what *some* aspects of *some* of the arts can do in opening up *some* aspects of the incarnation." Begbie, *Beholding the Glory*, xiv.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

the intellect with the other facets of our human make-up – our bodies, wills, emotional life, and so on.”¹⁸⁸

There is an apparent need to balance the relationship between privileging the interpretation of art and affirming interdisciplinary exchange that does not reduce or deduct from the task of theology. For Trevor Hart, “it is finally God-talk – and God-talk as shaped decisively by the doctrine of the incarnation – that lies at the heart of whatever distinctive contribution to intellectual conversation theology may have to make...”¹⁸⁹ Hart also writes of literature within the theological task, which “...may indeed function as a form of theology precisely as literature, and may even be better suited to deal with some theological issues than its more systematic and dogmatic counterparts.”¹⁹⁰ To present art ‘as a form of theology precisely as’ art, reframes the theological locus that avoids the ‘top down’ theological mappings that Worley laments. Begbie’s contribution acknowledges the importance of maintaining the distinctiveness of the arts, yet his hermeneutic lens is theological tradition and scripture.

Privileging of arts: a natural theology

Considering methodological orientations that privilege the status of the art object as the centre for any theological enquiry, natural theology emerges as another mode of operation. Natural theology can be defined in a broad or narrow sense. According to David Ray Griffin, narrowly “it consists of arguments for the existence of God.”¹⁹¹ Yet broadly, “any philosophical cosmology providing a framework for speaking of a divine reality can be called a natural theology.”¹⁹² Natural theology is divisive, representing one of the discrepancies between Catholic and Protestant theological aesthetics. Its attraction, as Pattison points out, lies in the orientation of a theology of art that affirms

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Trevor Hart, *Between the Image and the Word: Theological Engagements with Imagination, Language and Literature* (Surrey, Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 2, accessed 25 October 2018, ProQuest eBook Central. An aspect of this particular study that is of interest to my project is his careful navigation of sacramental thought in relation to aesthetics. He cites David Brown, Frank Burch Brown and Richard Viladesau as forerunners in this kind of conversation, where the emphasis on way the “divine presence [is] rendered accessible through an aesthetic encounter with natural to cultural phenomena...” Ibid., 7.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹¹ David Ray Griffin, “Process Thought and Natural Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*, ed. Russell Re Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 277.

¹⁹² Ibid.

the “facticity of human experience,” which is to say, works “from below.”¹⁹³ F. B. Brown notes a renewed interest in various iterations of theological and aesthetic interpretation of the divine in nature or culture.¹⁹⁴ Also acknowledging this renewed interest, Begbie notes the way that the “integrity” of the arts is “far better preserved by this form of theologizing.”¹⁹⁵

Anthony Monti’s natural theology of the arts employs a methodology that includes a form of critical realism as an epistemological approach that grounds his hermeneutics. Critical realism, in this case, is a term used within theology and science debates, with its origin in the approach posited by Michael Polanyi and picked up by other scientists turned theologians.¹⁹⁶ Monti refers to the way critical realism makes way for circular knowing or the hermeneutic circle. And the hermeneutic circle is held up by the epistemic circle: “how we know is controlled by the nature of the object and the nature of the object is revealed through our knowledge of it.”¹⁹⁷ Monti follows John Polkinghorne’s analogy of two circles which represent “a dialogue between interpretation and experience...”¹⁹⁸ He calls upon Polanyi, for the idea of tacit understanding implicit within this approach. Within an epistemology for approaching an art work, tacit knowledge can be categorised in aesthetic terms. In this sense, tacit understanding is derived from art.¹⁹⁹

For Monti, a natural theology of the arts as approached through an epistemology of critical realism, would have the following methodological features. Firstly, critical realism posits the same circular interpretive process that happens when reading a work of art. Secondly, “tacit understanding is central to every act of knowledge” including

¹⁹³ Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith*, 56.

¹⁹⁴ Frank Burch Brown “Aesthetics and the Arts in Relation to Natural Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*, 523–539.

¹⁹⁵ Begbie “Natural Theology and Music,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Natural theology*, 566.

¹⁹⁶ Monti cites N.T. Wright’s definition of the term: “the process of ‘knowing’ that acknowledges the reality of the thing known as something other than the knower (hence ‘realism’), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the known (hence ‘critical’).” N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1 (London: SPCK/Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press), 35, in Monti, *A Natural Theology of the Arts: Imprint of the Spirit* (Ashgate, 2003), 13.

¹⁹⁷ Monti, *A Natural Theology of the Arts*, 15.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 25.

that of art and theology, both of which engage the realm of the personal.²⁰⁰ As Polkinghorne argues, “[the] more highly personal an encounter, the more critical is its uniqueness and the more its evaluation will call for a judgement that can only be exercised by those actually involved in it.”²⁰¹ Here the correlation is made between the disciplines of art (interpretation) and theology, in the sense that they both deal with personal encounter within the interpretive and explanatory endeavour. Thirdly, following N.T. Wright, Monti refers to the “storied” nature of human knowing, where tacit knowledge might embrace aesthetic categories and concepts through which to gain access to truth.²⁰² Fourthly, critical realism allows for a “metaphysic of flexible openness,”²⁰³ which is to say that it supports an “ontology that finds its completion in the existence of God.”²⁰⁴ Monti is positing a “*transformed natural theology*,” where art can provide knowledge of God but requires a metaphysic to support it.²⁰⁵ Monti approaches the question of how “aesthetic experiences ‘fit in’ with the best ‘story’ that we can tell about reality, so that these experiences lend support to the story [creation as the triune act] even as the story makes sense of these experiences.”²⁰⁶

Monti’s natural theology of the arts is intricate, however the central principle of the hermeneutic task within his systematics is worth affirming. Natural theology also supports a reading of the history of art where encounter with the divine is located in the natural world. In light of my artist studies and the modernist tradition of the spiritual in art, natural theology is relevant for discussing questions of divine reality in the natural world.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ J. Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Dialogue between Science and Theology*, (London: SPCK, 1991), 53 – 54 cited in Ibid.

²⁰² Monti, *A Natural Theology of the Arts*, 25.

²⁰³ Ibid., 29.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 26. Here, “metaphor is a supreme instance of perichoresis, relationality and particularity.” Ibid., 52. So links can be drawn between the transcendentals and aesthetics. Gunton’s “open transcendentals” are notions employed for the exploration of the “universal marks of being.” Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 142, in Monti, *A Natural Theology of the Arts*, 46.

²⁰⁵ Monti, *A Natural Theology of the Arts*, 31.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 130.

Lived experiences: theopoetics

The question of art as a relevant source for theology emerges within a theopoetic sensibility. The term theopoetics emerged from a context that valued the arts as meaningful for theology, as the arts were considered more accessible to the world than the ivory tower of theology. Theopoetics is considered a reorientation of theological language as an embodied poetics. Hermeneutical theory contributed to its development, placing value on lived experience and the poetic against traditional metaphysics. A theological sensibility that values the hermeneutical premise of lived experience, is a promising framework that prioritises the work of art. The immediate interest of theopoetics for a project on art is its situation as a creative practice itself.

Stanley Hopper is credited as the first scholar to theorise the term “theopoetics.”²⁰⁷ The cultural context that informed the development of Hopper’s theological position stems from his involvement on the board of The Society of the Arts, Religion, and Contemporary Culture (SARCC),²⁰⁸ his involvement in Drew University’s ‘Consultations on Hermeneutics;’ and the movement of Radical Theology.²⁰⁹ SARCC members ranged from a variety of professional backgrounds, and the arts featured as the point of orientation in the relationship between religion and the arts. The founding members were committed to opening a space where the arts, and contemporary culture might demonstrate the capacity to “address the Universal in contemporary society,” as a medium more in touch with the contemporary world than religion.²¹⁰ The Drew University Consultations of Hermeneutics also encouraged a scholarly exchange where the Religion and Literature movement, Martin Heidegger’s later philosophical work,

²⁰⁷ See Stanley Hopper’s lecture, “The Literary Imagination and the Doing of Theology,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, 1971. L. Callid Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water: A Theopoetics Primer* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 2.

²⁰⁸ SARCC was “founded in late 1961 by three men: Alfred Barr Jr., the art critic and founder of the Museum of Modern Art, and the theologians Paul Tillich and Marvin Halverson....Its first board of directors included these three as well as Unitarian Universalist theologian and parish minister James Luther Adams; mythologist Joseph Campbell; principle developer of the merger forming the United Church of Christ, Truman B. Douglas; Congregationalist parish minister and theologian, Amos Wilder; and Stanley Hopper.” *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹⁰ Bill Conklin, Email Correspondence, in *Ibid.*, 18.

and Rudolf Bultmann's biblical interpretation formed a nexus of influence.²¹¹ Bultmann was influenced by Heidegger's phenomenology, against traditional metaphysics, and which informed his approach to hermeneutics. Here the lived experience of the individual came before assumed doctrinal positions. For Heidegger also, the poetic was a privileged site. And for Bultmann, the interpreter's context emerged as an important part of the process of biblical interpretation.²¹² Through the Drew Consultations, the language of theology itself became a topic of consideration. If theology too is an invented language and the poetic emerges as a category for negotiating questions of being human, then the theological endeavour as poetics appears promising. The influence of Radical Theology, and then 'Death of God Theology,' can also be noted.²¹³ For Hopper, theological language was too removed from lived experience and aesthetics, which can be significantly involved in personal perceptions of divine reality. The reorientation of theological language, as L. B. Callid Keefe-Perry expresses it, did not just mean a change in style or rhetoric, but "a deep aesthetic recalibration in which the terms of discussion would be reconfigured to shift from a kind of scientific mechanicalism toward an organic and embodied surplus of meaning."²¹⁴ According to Hopper, "theology founded upon the mathematical models of propositional logic is founded upon a profound metaphysical error."²¹⁵

²¹¹ Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water*, 19.

²¹² Ibid., 21.

²¹³ Keefe-Perry mentions three streams of Death of God Theology: "(1) Thomas J. J. Altizer's 'extreme kenosis' theological argument, in which he posits 'God had become fully human in Christ, so as to lose his divine attributes and therefore his divine existence'; (2) William Hamilton's sociological argument 'that modern people were unable any more to believe in God, and the church ought, therefore, to seek to do without him as well'; and (3) Paul Van Buren's social-linguistic claim that 'the concept of God was 'cognitively meaningless,' since God's existence and nature were not verifiable or falsifiable by the methods of science.'" John Frame, "Death of God Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. David F. Wright and Sinclair B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer (InterVarsity Press, 1988), 194 in, Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water*, 23. Keefe-Perry cites Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) as a key text.

²¹⁴ Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water*, 28.

²¹⁵ Hopper, "The Literary Imagination," 224, in Ibid. Hopper writes: "Theology tends to develop talk about God logically, where the logos is constrained within the model of Aristotelian propositional thinking; whereas theopoetics stresses the poem dimension, the creativity of God, his is-ness, if you wish to theologize it, so that I must move within his own creative nature and must construe him creatively...If I am going to talk about God, I must recognize this mythopoetic, metaphorical nature of the language I use." Stanley Hopper, "Introduction" in *Interpretation: The Poetry of Meaning*, ed. David L. Miller, ix–xxii. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1967), 3. Viewed at <https://artsreligionculture.org/definitions/> (16 November 2017).

Theopoetics is not confined to particular religious affiliations or theological systematics, but one of its iterations marks a space ‘after the death of God.’ For instance, David L. Miller argues:

But if one thinks that “after the death of God” signifies the continuing impact of an understanding of the times as severed from any dependencies on transcendental referents, then theopoetics will have to refer to strategies of human signification in the absence of fixed and ultimate meanings accessible to knowledge or faith. I should like to refer to this perspective as “theopoetics,” as it involves a poetics and not a poetry, i.e., a reflection on poesis, a formal thinking about the nature of the making of meaning, which subverts the -ology, the nature of the logic, of theology.²¹⁶

Keefe-Perry argues that “theopoetics maintains what [Roland] Faber terms a polyphilia, or love of multiplicity, and as such, prompts a joining of voices.”²¹⁷ This sensibility supports a link between theology and spirituality. In this sense, for Keefe-Perry, theopoetics is “...doxological not doctrinal.”²¹⁸ He continues:

Theopoetics is not another theology, claiming to have God all figured out and hegemonically excluding the possibility of any validity beyond itself. Nor is it simply an aesthetic move toward writing about religion in verse. Theopoetics is an invitation to begin to ‘read’ the entirety of experience as scripture, until daily life itself becomes infused with heirophany and a call to faithfulness...

Theopoetics is a means of engaging language and perception in such a way that one enters into a radical relation with the divine, the other, and the creation in which all occurs.²¹⁹

For Catherine Keller there is a four-fold definition of theopoetics where the foundations of theological tradition are placed under scrutiny: it is self-critically aware of its limits and committed to “[keeping] discourse vibrant and relevant;” it “occurs in a space

²¹⁶ David L. Miller, “Theopoetry of Theopoetics?” in *Crosscurrents* Vol. 60, No. 1, (March 2010): 8.

²¹⁷ L. B. Callid Keefe-Perry, “Theopoetics: Process and Perspective,” in *Christianity and Literature* vol. 58, no. 4 (Summer 2009), 596.

²¹⁸ Keefe-Perry, “Theopoetics: Process and Perspective,” 596.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 597.

between theopoetics and theopolitics” as a “creative practice;” it is a form of “theology-as-method,” engaged with biblical tradition, and provides a ground for “a multiplicity of oscillations” within its fold.²²⁰ Roland Faber refers to theopoetics as a mode in which the practitioner “moves into an ‘undefined land,’” through the creative endeavour of writing “new theological language.”²²¹ For theologian Scott Holland, “it is not a smooth systematics, a dogmatics, or a metaphysics; as a theopoetics it is a kind of writing.”²²² From another perspective, poet Jeff Gundy, states that theopoetics “has to do with the effort to articulate what it means to seek God...in the hazardous and precious medium of language, informed by what has come before, but not bound to formulas and doctrines.”²²³ Then for Matt Guynn, “the theo-poet uses the occasion of the poem to creatively suggest, ambiguously hint, generously intimate in ways that create space for the reader or the public to face the unknown, engage Mystery, to dream and be transformed.”²²⁴ Artist and feminist theologian Kate Common outlines a definition whereupon theopoetics is “built around...poetic practices and ways of knowing.”²²⁵ The collation of these positions is attributed to ARC²²⁶ who define theopoetics as demonstrating the following characteristics:

²²⁰ Catherine Keller, “Appendix of Definitions,” in Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water*, 205.

²²¹ Roland Faber, “Process Theology as Theopoetics.” Lecture at Kresge Chapel, Claremont School of Theology, February 7, 2006, cited at <http://theopoetics.net/what-is-theopoetics/definitions/> (2 October 2017).

²²² Scott Holland, *How Do Stories Save Us?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), xix-xxi, cited at <http://theopoetics.net/what-is-theopoetics/definitions/> (2 October 2017).

²²³ Jeffrey Gundy, “Songs from an Empty Cage: Some Notes on Theopoetics.” Lecture at Hillsdale College 2/13/12. In John Rasche’s “Gundy speaks at Hillsdale College.” Online: <http://www.hillsdale.net/article/20120216/NEWS/302169939>, cited at <http://theopoetics.net/what-is-theopoetics/definitions/> (Accessed 2 October 2017).

²²⁴ Matt Guynn, “Theopoetics: That the Dead May Become Gardeners Again,” *Cross Currents* (2006) 98–109, 99, cited at <http://theopoetics.net/what-is-theopoetics/definitions/> (Accessed 2 October 2017).

²²⁵ Kate Common, “Theopoetics via Liberation Theologies, Queer Theory, and Continental Thought.” Presentation at the 2015 meeting of the American Academy of Religion: New England and Maritime Region, cited at <http://theopoetics.net/what-is-theopoetics/definitions/> (Accessed 2 October 2017).

²²⁶ ARC is “a creative collaborative for theopoetics” and a merger between The Association for Theopoetics Research and Exploration: At the Intersection of Theology, Imagination, Aesthetics, and Embodiment (ATRE) and The Society for Arts, Religion, and Contemporary Culture (SARCC) See ARC “Our Story” <https://artsreligionculture.org/history/> (Accessed 14 August 2018). The Foundation for Art, Religion and Culture (FARC) later became the Society for the Arts, Religion and Contemporary Culture (ARC) and then SARCC. In 2017: “On the basis of shared vision and hope for conversation and activity that is less bound to the academy and more professionally, racially, and geographically diverse, SARCC and ATRE [The Association for Theopoetics Research and Exploration] merge. On May 26th the groups formally joined and on October 3rd the joint groups committed to changing the new organization's name

Theopoetics is (1) an emphasis, style, and positive concern for the intersection of theology and spirituality with the imagination, aesthetics, and the arts, especially as (2) it takes shape in ways that engender community-affirming dialogue that is (3) transformative in effect and (4) explicit about embodiment's importance.²²⁷

Within this theological sensibility, art is affirmed as a valid "source of religious reflection."²²⁸ Theopoetics emerges as a creative praxis. As a form of aesthetic theology, theopoetics is a method. This approach supports the site of lived experience for doing theology; a site which produces the poetic impulse and methodologically shapes the task for a project between art and theology. It is also invitational, in the sense that it rests between spirituality and theology by affirming lived experience. For Keefe-Perry "theopoetics is an active, embodied perspective, generating language that reveals some of the nature of the divine in this world, making it easier to see the divine in the everyday."²²⁹

Reading literature or the arts as ways of doing theology (art as theology precisely as art), encompasses a theopoetic sensibility. The consideration of Hotere and Paul as practitioners of theopoetics is one way of engaging with their work and practice that affirms the way lived experience generates a relation between art and religion. A theopoetic perspective provides space to consider pluralisms and multiplicities of relation between art and religion. This perspective also relieves concern over ways that religious dispositions and expressions resist easy alignments with theological traditions. In relation to Hotere's and Paul's art, theopoetics emerges, not as a method of writing on my part, but as what these artists do. My task is to explore their polyphilic expressions. Rather than consider the contributions of Hotere and Paul through a theological paradigm, I consider their work as expressions of theology.

back to ARC." "ARC: A creative collaborative for theopoetics" <https://artsreligionculture.org/history/> (Accessed 11 Sep 2018).

²²⁷ ATRE, <http://theopoetics.net/> (Accessed 2 October 2017).

²²⁸ ARC, <https://artsreligionculture.org/definitions> (Accessed 14 August 2018).

²²⁹ Keefe-Perry, "Theopoetics: Process and Perspective," 590.

Lived experience: feminist methodologies

The wider literature of theology and art lacks critical attention to the connection between theological aesthetics and feminist thought, aesthetics or spirituality. Therefore, it is an area that warrants consideration. Like a theopoetic sensibility, feminist hermeneutics also values lived experience as an interpretive premise. A feminist theological hermeneutic also supports the interpretation of the feminist historical context in which Joanna Margaret Paul was engaged.

Historical theologian Margaret Miles's contribution can be placed within the bounds of a feminist recovery of women's perspectives in the arts. Miles argues that traditions of Christian art and iconography, alongside textual sources, provide significant texts for theology and give insight into historical societal situations – particularly that of women.²³⁰ She locates significant gaps of scholarship in the arts and religion that does not include gender issues; alternatively when gender issues are considered, it is to the detriment of religious studies. She cites Broude and Garrard's suggestion that "the best way to change art history...is simply to practice it in a new way."²³¹ For Miles, a cultural studies approach provides a way forward for multidisciplinary inclusion that affirms "*connections*" rather than attempting to build "bridges across chasms."²³²

The absence of women (women artists or women theologians) in recent theological aesthetics is emphatically acknowledged by the contributors to *She Who Imagines: Feminist Theological Aesthetics*. While this volume is still somewhat removed from feminist theory and art historical scholarship, the editors Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O'Connell, present a sound feminist theological methodology. In this volume the rehabilitation of the topic of beauty is a preeminent concern, which calls for the establishment of a connection between theological aesthetics and social ethics. Cassidy and O'Connell outline a methodology that "must be accountable to the lived material conditions of women," and to this end "examines and draws theological insight from

²³⁰ Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

²³¹ Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, eds., *Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 7, cited in Margaret Miles "Gender, Imagery, and Religious Imagination," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, 475.

²³² Miles "Gender, Imagery, and Religious Imagination," 472.

specific social and cultural contexts in the creation or distortion of beauty.”²³³ Feminist theology is earthed in an acknowledgment of the “theological significance of human experience.”²³⁴

The European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR) 2009 conference presented the topic “Art & Religion” from which emerged a volume of contributions on Feminist theology and Visual Arts.²³⁵ This volume provides a more diverse approach to the connection between art and religion. One topic of concern focussed on women’s art that addressed liturgical and spiritual contexts situated outside of both art world communities and religious communities. The question of how to conduct a dialogue between feminist theology and visual art was also considered. Art historian and theologian Monika Leisch-Kiesl presents an outline for an open and “transparent methodology” that would also sustain questions of gender.²³⁶ The body takes precedence within Stefanie Knauss’s argument, as both an ethical and essential foundation for relationship with the world and knowledge formation.²³⁷ Within this

²³³ Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O’Connell, *She Who Imagines: Feminist Theological Aesthetics* ed. Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O’Connell, Foreword by Elizabeth A. Johnson (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), xiii.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ *Feminist Theology and Visual Art, Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* vol. 19, ed. Annette Esser, Christine Gasser-Schuchter, Sylvia Grevel, Alison Jasper, Ursula Rapp (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2011), <http://www.peeters-leuven.be/boekoverz.asp?nr=9157> (accessed 6 September 2017).

²³⁶ Monika Leisch-Kiesl, “Kunst als Sprache der Religion Methodologische Überlegungen,” (Art as a Language of Religion: Methodological Reflections), in *Feminist Theology and Visual Art*, 27-38. She acknowledges a form of translation and perception involved in the interpretation of art that is likened to learning a language; an interpretive approach that also necessarily involves the reception and context of any given artwork. At the basis of Leisch-Kiesl’s argument appears to be an acknowledgment of the multiple, complex, and contradictory, interpretations of the terms ‘religion’ and ‘art,’ which are open to many points of reference and interpretation. Leisch-Kiesl outlines a basic methodology with the aim of opening up the discussion in a transparent way.

²³⁷ Stefanie Knauss, “The Language of the Senses: An Aesthetic Theology,” in *Feminist Theology and Visual Art*, 53-65. She cites feminist or gender-conscious theologians: Virginia Burrus, Catherine Keller, Gerard Loughlin, Margaret D. Kamitsuka, Marcella Althaus-Reid. See also, Stefanie Knauss, “The Sensuality of Sense: Reflections on the Bodily Dimension of Filmic and Religious Experience,” in *Reconfigurations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religion in a Post-Secular Society*, ed. Stefanie Knauss and Alexander D. Ornella (LIT: Wien, 2007), 197 – 216. Other contributions to the *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* volume range from the political and feminist dimensions of icons in the Easter Orthodox church (Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou); pedagogical issues with regard to the transmission of images of God, (Silva Martinez Cano); art therapy in the context of feminist theology (Annette Esser); Jewish-Christian dialogue in the context of an exhibition entitled “Next year in Jerusalem,” (Ursula Rudnick). Other titles include, “Artistic and theological interventions in medical art,” by Heike Knops; “Wrestling with God and humans: Godard’s view of gender

volume however, there is little awareness of the context of feminist methodologies or theory within the wider art world, and no mention of feminist art historians or theorists. In addition, wider dialogue between theology and art is not mentioned in any substantial way.²³⁸

A hermeneutic of lived experience is presented in Ruth Illman and W. Alan Smith's "practical theology of the arts,"²³⁹ which draws upon feminist critical tools within a postmodern and post-secular context.²⁴⁰ The authors posit a "theology of art" with a methodology that places the theological exercise in resistance to the hegemonic centre ("dogmatic statements of absolute 'truth'") of modern theology.²⁴¹ The premise of lived experience within their approach is outlined as follows:

Feminist theologies, third world "liberation" theologies, and hermeneutical approaches to philosophy and theology...emphasize an "experienced" truth that emerges out of the dialogue characteristic of each community of faith, an appreciation for an intentional form of listening to the voice of the "other" that makes it "safe" for that "other" to experience authentic personhood, and a commitment to the "practices" of theological insights toward the end of transformation of persons, communities, and society as a whole.²⁴²

Illman and Smith cite John W. de Gruchy as an advocate, perhaps a forerunner, of this approach.²⁴³ As a practical theology their approach is invested in theological applicability to cultural dialogue. The goal is transformation; they posit a practical

relationships as illustrated in his film *Hail Mary*," by Agnese Maria Fortuna. Thalia Gur Klein and Liesbeth Hoeven separate contributions present ways of coming to terms with the shoah. And reflections on artistic process and questions of faith, are approached in disparate contributions by artists Benita Joswig, Caroline Mackenzie, and Megan Clay.

²³⁸ A collation of email correspondence between some of the contributors forms the first chapter of this volume. Here, for the most part, they speak in reflection from their personal positions, as visual art practitioners or as theologians.

²³⁹ Illman and Smith posit this thesis as drawing upon the arts to "provide support for and a mechanism that enables the emergence of a practical theology in which *habitus* can, once again allow all persons of faith to practice theology." Ruth Illman and W. Alan Smith, *Theology and the Arts: Engaging Faith* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 5.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ See John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

theology of the arts which involves “the concept of *praxis*...[and an epistemology] characterized as “knowledge-for-the-sake-of-transformation.”²⁴⁴ Praxis is defined as an alternative route from theory and practice, but it informs the dialectic: “praxis circumscribes a constantly moving, dynamic interaction in which theory and practice redefine one another in a swirling, spiralling interaction. As the subjects in dialogue engage one another and listen to each person’s claims to truth concerning their shared subject matter, they *too* become transformed.”²⁴⁵

Illman and Smith posit a hermeneutical, and theoretical approach, following the premise set by Hans-Georg Gadamer, with the notion of “hermeneutics as a *fusion of horizons* (Horizontverschmelzung).”²⁴⁶ The authors believe that practical theology should by definition, be inherently dialogical. They employ the image of an “upward and forward moving spiral” in contrast to a closed circle, to describe their dialogical approach.²⁴⁷ The authors also spend some time outlining a feminist theological approach that is predominantly defined as maintaining the characteristics of a practical theology. A small reference is made to the Women’s art Movement: “For artists like Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, the woman’s body became a metaphor for feminist spirituality and the ““sacred.””²⁴⁸ The authors also mention the definition of art practice as performance that Chicago affirms. Predominantly, Illman and Smith focus on feminist theology outside of the arts, with its foundations in women’s experience, emphasising “relationality, community, embodiment, a horizontal and egalitarian structure, and grounding in the practices of ‘faithful sociality.’”²⁴⁹

Critical engagement with feminist aesthetics or theory within the literature of theology and art, seems seriously lacking. While the theoretical premise of embodied lived experience is affirmed by a range of scholars I reviewed, feminist scholars sometimes

²⁴⁴ Illman and Smith, *Theology and the Arts*, 7.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. At a fundamental level, for Gadamer, and the authors of this volume, “encountering a text or a person always includes interpreting.” Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 8-9. The authors also base their practical theology drawing on dialogical philosophy, with the mention of Martin Buber, Gadamer, Emmanuel Levinas, and Knud E. Løgstrup. The essential sweeping ethos resided in the point that human beings are dialogical beings.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 25.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

place a central emphasis on this point. That hermeneutics should be transformative, relational and embodied, is affirmed as an interpretive principle for both studies in this dissertation. The art practice of Joanna Margaret Paul can be situated at the emergence of the women's art movement. She maintained a tangential or qualified appreciation for the political stance of feminism, yet her practice embodies the location of lived experience as a major point of orientation. She was also an influential figure in the early days of the women's art movement in Aotearoa New Zealand. While feminism is not particular to interpreting Hotere, the methodology espoused, particularly by Illman and Smith, is implicit within my interpretive stance.

Summary

In this section of my review, the interdisciplinary task involves a primary commitment to the discipline of theology. In addition, theological commitments vary between traditions. This review is broad in scope, for the purposes of garnering threads of connection and consensus and avoids adherence to a single theological framework at the outset. However, the review is also conducted with an eye for certain approaches that would support the two artist studies that follow. I have reviewed contributions that espouse a theological aesthetics as it pertains to the tradition of aesthetics in relation to divine revelation. I considered scholars who argue for the broadening of definitions so as to more closely engage with theoretical considerations in art history. I considered theological contributions that move away from theologies of art, towards privileging the status of the work of art in its particularity. I concluded with theological contributions that emerge from the poetic expressions of lived experience.

An assessment of the literature on theological engagement with the arts draws out the importance of valuing the position of art *as* theology. While theology has a particularity and conceptual history that is worth preserving because it provides language for the sacred for which other disciplines are not fully equipped, there is a need to find a balance that also preserves the language of art. This emphasis is observable in all the approaches examined here but it is couched within or along a spectrum of theological standpoints that individual theologians espouse. The argument against theological approaches to art that maintain their own agenda without fully acknowledging the world

of the art work is unfounded, as each theologian contributes to the dialogue with particular and relevant theological insight.²⁵⁰ With differing emphasises or approaches to theological tradition, most of these scholars place their work at a juncture that acknowledges a place for theological aesthetics in the wake of modernity.

On the whole, theologians working in dialogue with the arts maintain an upfront and appropriate methodological sensitivity. Several theological projects I have reviewed, stress the importance of conducting a conversation between theology and art that must ‘respect the integrity’ of the art or practice under examination. Pattison questions the need for a theology of art, and instead opts to ground analysis in the art under investigation. He stresses the dialogical nature of the task, grounding his approach in phenomenology. His preference is to avoid an ontological underpinning for a theology of art.²⁵¹ F. B. Brown states that the conversation between religion and the arts should be “complementary and dialectical.”²⁵² He takes an approach that is open to conversation between disciplines, and broadens into hermeneutics, religion and phenomenology.²⁵³ In addition to these thinkers, David Jasper proffers the idea of “thinking *theologically*.”²⁵⁴ According to Jasper, this means that when the artist or interpreter “thinks theologically,” they “have moved beyond anything like a specific ‘Christian criticism’, to something that is more difficult, more elusive and often recognized only in glimpses – and which acknowledges the deep and original seriousness of the artist in his or her vocation.”²⁵⁵

Hart’s suggestion that “...literature [or art] may indeed function as a form of theology precisely as literature [or art], and may even be better suited to deal with some

²⁵⁰ David Jasper outlines the characteristic of engagement of religion and the arts from the 1970s and 80s, in which the arts were approached in terms of their religious content, or as “illustrations” of religious notions. With the emergence of literary and culture theory, this approach began to change in the 1980s, where the writer was “given...credit” and taken seriously for their contributions and the content not merely “translated into the truths of...any other kind of secondary discourse.” David Jasper, “Interdisciplinarity in Impossible Times: Studying Religion through Literature and the Arts,” in *Literature and Theology: New Interdisciplinary Spaces*, ed. Heather Walton (New York: Routledge, 2016), 6.

²⁵¹ Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith*, xiii.

²⁵² Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 88.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁵⁴ Jasper, “Interdisciplinarity in Impossible Times,” 7. Jasper follows Heidegger’s idea of *Denken* (thinking).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

theological issues than [their] more systematic and dogmatic counterparts,”²⁵⁶ is another approach that maintains the integrity of the subject under investigation. Worley also orientated his doctoral thesis towards modelling an appropriate contextualisation for his artist case studies. For Worley, an engagement with theological concerns that arise from the artists he investigates, avoids top down “theological aspirations for art” and attends to the specificity of the religious content under consideration.²⁵⁷ Drawing upon the arts for theological insight, Viladesau, stresses a methodological approach to the conversation in which collaboration is important. As a theological aesthetics within the mode of a foundational theology, the arts are considered to be a mode of mediation of divine revelation. The main conclusion here is an emphasis on the need to maintain an inherent hermeneutical approach to the task.

A theological paradigm that shifts the contours of discussion further from traditional metaphysics to affirm the basis of lived experience embedded within the poetics of the text, emerges through theopoetics and feminist theologies. Feminist and theopoetic approaches keep in mind an ethical approach to questions of the relation between transcendence and immanence. Theopoetics is an example of a methodology that is deeply hermeneutical. The added value of this theological sensibility is the sense of freedom afforded to the task of writing theology. Theopoetics, at the nexus of process theology, narrative theology and postmodern philosophy, for example, presents the basic argument that theology is more akin to poetry than science, and poetic articulations of lived embodied experience can be sites for divine revelation. Theopoetics is more than a textual or poetic aspect of theological aesthetics, as it resists the intellectualism of theology. As a form of theologizing, however, a theopoetic sensibility is more oriented towards theology, rather than necessarily treating art works as objects within specific studies.

Feminist theology reminds us of the theoretical importance of lived experience for conducting theology that is community orientated and transformative. Reference to feminist methodology is significant given the historical context of my artist studies, and

²⁵⁶ Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 8.

²⁵⁷ Worley, “Theology and Contemporary Visual Art,” 97.

the lack of consideration found within the literature of theology and art of the twentieth century. While valuable for the field at large, spelling out the implications of feminist theory for the field of theological aesthetics, is a sub-interest of my study. It is more specifically confined to the historical juncture with which Paul was associated, and to her own reflections on her art and practice. This involves the dismantling of the artist's subjectivity, the fostering of collaborative endeavours, and supporting a notion of transformative praxis, both personal and abstract.

This review highlights several points of orientation for my artist studies. Firstly, questions pertaining to divine revelation as mediated through art is addressed. Secondly, I invoke the support of a theology that affirms the site of material reality as central to the consideration of the embodied ways in which artists engage with spiritual or religious concerns. Thirdly, I privilege the site of lived experience as sustaining a relational and embodied approach to art practice and spirituality. My writing does not adopt the sensibility of theopoetics in the way that scholars working in that area espouse, but I consider the expressions of Hotere and Paul as implicitly theopoetic. If theopoetics opens up considerations for 'theology-as-method,' I consider the possibility of art-as-method for theology.

I also highlight three methodological considerations affirmed by many theologians working at the intersection of the arts. First: a theology that upholds the integrity of the art under investigation is important, as I adopt an approach to my artist studies that begins at the site of the artists' production. Second: the need to broaden horizons of interpretation emerges as a way of encompassing multiple disciplinary positions, and sites of interpretation. Lastly, a hermeneutical approach that fosters dialogical, poetic, embodied, and transformative experience, emerges as the primary methodology.

Interdisciplinarity: art history, religion and theology

This project focuses on the work and practice of two late modern artists with specific attention to spiritual and religious content. An outline of the broader contours of discussion on the relation between art and religion is needed to contextualise these studies within the discourse. Outlining the parameters of recent dialogue in the field of art and religion also helps stake out prevailing concerns and approaches that will be implicit within the two studies. An initial broader approach to the field of religion and art also helps to locate sites of engagement that support the study of art history.

This broader discussion on the relation of religion or spirituality to art also highlights some common areas of concern for any engagement in the topic. First, I considered a general ‘cognitive dissonance’ on the relation of religion and art in the art world. In general, explicitly religious art is read as problematic, and conversely, language employed within art criticism when spiritual concerns emerge is often vague. On the other hand, these terms often have conceptual histories associated with or extracted from theological tradition. Two concerns emerge for this project: the question of situating a study of art and religion against a prevailing secularism in the arts, and the importance of the specificity of religious or theological language in the exchange.

Reviewing discussion on the relation of religion and art, by scholars within art history, religion and theology, reveals a range of methodological approaches. The discipline in which the scholar is situated often informs the methodological shape of their project. In broad terms, approaches range from a focus on the art object, religious practice, or theological insight, where content, context, or theological tradition take precedence. However, common approaches to common concerns emerge across the disciplines.

Considering the general differentiation between object centred art history, practice centred study of religion, and theological aesthetics as categorical approaches to the arts, I want now to consider if and how these fields might complement each other, towards shaping a methodological way forward. A primary division might be between a content or context-based method, which orients the interpreter towards one approach over the other. An heuristic approach places hermeneutical emphasis on shifting

orientations in dialogue. The art historians and religion scholars I have reviewed have argued for the broadening of fields, towards considering a broader contextual material culture approach. F. B. Brown makes a similar move, through the redefinition of aesthetics. Theologians highlight the inherent importance of hermeneutics for the engagement between art, culture, religion or theology. The need for an art historical enquiry to take religion seriously is one conclusion; the need for theology to take methods of religion into consideration is another. Art historians tend to express a concern that theology might infringe too much upon art with dogmatic agendas. Here attention is paid to the particularities of histories of art, but the handling of religious and theological terminology often becomes conflated and generalised. There is also need for theological specificity to help elucidate the ‘fuzzy’ language of art critics who acknowledge the heritage of spiritual terms in art. But then how does this alter the implications of meaning for art, if these terms are understood through a religious context? Elkins highlights this problematic. There is also a fair amount of shared interest between disparate scholars. Philosophical phenomenology that affirms sense perception as a way of knowing, is both a shared theoretical concern and methodological point of orientation, intimately connected with hermeneutical theory. It looms large as a sustained philosophical tradition to which modern theology has strong ties.

Scholars who write from the perspective of art history generally affirm the primacy of the art as the beginning of any enquiry. The scholars I reviewed presented the need to overcome secular discourse and resituate a critical engagement with religion. Theologically specific language is important. Appropriate methodological approaches include the need to be methodologically creative and self-critical. Working through material culture is one approach; as is an engagement with enchantment narratives. Hermeneutical approaches are also encouraged.

Scholars in religion also highlight the need to situate engagement with the topic of art and religion against secular modernism or disenchantment narratives. The primary theoretical orientation of this field is situated in material culture. Materially grounded definitions of aesthetics, that affirm lived experience and embodied spirituality are

highlighted. The specificity of theological and religiously specific language is also regarded as important.

Contemporary scholarship within the study of religion and cultural studies – with a theoretical focus on the social, historical, and anthropological – is more open for engagement with theoretically orientated art history. Rifts between religion and the arts might be more readily mended here. Promey's argument for a 'restitution of religion in scholarly conversation' is warranted. Recent work within the field of religion in the wake of the material turn, brings certain theoretical situations to bear upon the discussion. The importance of affirming an embodied aesthetics, which is conceived as inherently ethical is another stance that can be considered universal. Religion scholars argue for an embedded, holistic and context-oriented approach, dovetailing with similar approaches within art history. Scholarship that works against the dominant disenchantment of modernity thesis is also a recurring point of departure for some scholars of religion and art history. Suzi Gablik is a forerunner here. The generalised use of so called 'quasi' or 'covert' religious terminology within art history presents an opportunity to explore the contextualisation and nuance of the theological underpinnings of these ideas. Theological tradition can help the interpreter unpack the conceptual histories of these terms.

Theologians affirm the importance of a hermeneutical and dialogic approach in general. Theologians engaged in dialogue with the arts or aesthetics approach the topic from a myriad of perspectives. They range from an engagement with aesthetics for theology, or an engagement with the arts in a hermeneutical sense. The field of theological aesthetics traditionally deals with the question of divine revelation and ranges over questions of the nature of divine relatedness to material reality. Some scholars work from the perspective of a foundational theology, explicitly considering questions pertaining to the ways art can mediate divine revelation. At the other end of the spectrum is the location of lived experience as the site for doing theology. Some scholars argue for a broadening of definitions in order to situate aesthetics within theology and consider theology as a relevant contribution to aesthetics. Others are opposed to the development of a theology of the arts and consider ways theology and art can work in dialogue.

Theologians are generally more abstract, attending more directly to things of a divine nature and their theological lenses are usually fixed in accordance with the individual scholar's chosen tradition. Yet others argue for the position of theology as an open "interpretive horizon"²⁵⁸ without a fixed agenda. From the perspective of the theological enquiry, in general, the arts seem to bring problematic theology to the table – in terms of the lineage of spiritual tradition that has informed the interests of modern artists and the singular esoteric choices to which individual artists choose to relate. The way theologians have handled these areas is a significant question. A classic example is Paul Tillich's theology of art that while robust, paid little heed to the intricacies of the art historical situation of the movement of Expressionism with which he was engaged.

Conclusions: my position

The need to construct and maintain a 'self-critical methodology,' emerges as the first step in outlining an approach to a project between art and religion. This approach encourages critical awareness and balance between the disparate parts of each artist study so that neither the art nor the religious perspective is overshadowed. An art historical approach values first the history and context of the work. Locating theological meaning within the work of art, as opposed to overarching tradition and content, emerges as important.

Within my hermeneutical approach I seek to affirm sites of embodiment, materiality, relationality as defining features of Hotere's and Paul's spiritual perspective. I affirm the spaces of lived experience as sites from which Hotere's and Paul's practices emerge and where engagement with religious or spiritual concerns originate. It is an approach that first acknowledges the situated practices of the artists themselves, which includes the visible evidence of decisions made by the artists and their work. The viewer's encounter with the work is also important as a form of inhabitation and reflection, and is part of the writing process.

I approach this study with the implicit goal of overcoming secular assumptions attached to modern art on one hand, and assumptions of disembodied notions of the spiritual in

²⁵⁸ Anderson, "The (In)visibility of Theology in Contemporary Art Criticism," 67.

art, on the other. I seek the support of theological language and tradition for the delineation of vague terms used in art history to refer to spiritual content. I also seek the interpretive support of contemporary enchantment narratives and material culture for the contextualisation of my artist studies.

The hermeneutical imperative

An approach that values hermeneutical circling, in the general sense, might also better avoid a closure of meaning and prevent the conversation from being insulated. Jasper states that “[the] only possible future for theological thinking in the Western context is through an interdisciplinary approach.”²⁵⁹ As such, Jasper refers to the “impossibility of any systematic theology” for the task, stating the need for any critical enquiry to be “deeply hermeneutical.”²⁶⁰ This approach is also emphasised by Anderson, particularly in relation to a kind of theological art criticism, where “artworks and [the] interpretive frameworks mutually challenge and shape one another.”²⁶¹ From another perspective, Monti endorses a methodology following the epistemology of critical realism established within the dialogue between theology and science. Hermeneutical circling as a mode of working and of knowing within the discipline of theology, also correlates with the arts. David Tracy presents the character of theology as a “fundamentally hermeneutical enterprise,” through which understanding happens in conversation, and can be correlated with the “witnessing of a work of art.”²⁶² Where personal encounter becomes the locus of investigation within both theology and the arts, a hermeneutical and epistemological circling supports engagement when one is intimately involved with their subject matter.

²⁵⁹ Jasper, “Interdisciplinarity in Impossible Times,” 5.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. Jasper believes the academy has “moved on ... from the notion of *interdisciplinarity*,” which perhaps only ever had traction within the context of the administration of university departments looking to expand their borders. Jasper, “Interdisciplinarity in Impossible Times,” 9. Jasper instead introduces the term *intradisciplinarity*, which he defines as “...not trying to find theology or religion still lurking in disguise in literary texts or works of art. It is, rather, for us today exploring ways in which a work of literature – a poem or a novel – in its own right, not necessarily so much by what it says as by how it says it or how it plays its games, can illuminate the way in which we think. Thus, perhaps, we can recognize old things in new guises, and thereby come to acknowledge that although the doctrine, practice and theology of the past remains powerful and even ‘true’ in a sense – at least for some of us – there can still be genuinely new ways of acknowledging old truths.” Jasper, “Interdisciplinarity in Impossible Times,” 9.

²⁶¹ Anderson, “The (In)visibility of Theology in Contemporary Art Criticism,” 74 – 75.

²⁶² David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 104.

Without becoming embroiled in phenomenological philosophy, a short definition of hermeneutics as an approach to reading art and theology in this context is warranted. In relation to art theory, Nicolas Davey finds a basis in Heidegger's ontological conception of the term: "*hermeneuein*... [which] suggests an engaged 'response' (*Entsprechung*), a listening in the manner of a saying-after (*nachsagen*) or thinking-along-with what the work itself says. Hermeneutics is not merely a matter of interpreting pre-given works: understanding is not what we aim at, it is what we are and do."²⁶³ For Davey, hermeneutics is an area of philosophy that emerged in conjunction with "the ascent of social and cultural modernity."²⁶⁴ Even the interpretive and perceptual process by which an art work is made adopts a hermeneutical principle: "it can be argued that hermeneutics has the distinction of being an active, unbroken tradition of philosophy whose central theme – transformation through understanding – seems to reveal something of the defining experience of cultural modernity: confrontation with otherness."²⁶⁵

Following Polkinghorne, the basic principles of undertaking interpretive research, first require that "the autonomy of the object [be accepted and] should not be forced into preconceived interpretive schemes..."; second, "the researcher must try to understand the phenomena in a more profound way than those who are involved in them or confronted with them"; third, "the researcher must try to achieve the greatest possible familiarity with the phenomena..."; fourth, it involves a circular "process of knowledge development that moves back and forth from understanding the parts to understanding the whole"; and lastly, "the researcher must try to show the meaning the phenomena have for the present situation...The act involves a fusion of the researcher's situation and the phenomena."²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Nicholas Davey, "Hermeneutics and Art Theory," in *A Companion to Art Theory*, ed. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 438.

²⁶⁴ Davey writes, "Both hermeneutics and the arts of modernity are very much preoccupied with the question of strangeness and the desire to discover in it something of the familiar." Davey, "Hermeneutics and Art Theory," 439.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 439.

²⁶⁶ Donald Polkinghorne, *Methodology for the Human Sciences: systems of inquiry* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 236-237.

The interpretive process of thinking along with the spiritual sensibilities of Hotere and Paul also privileges their contributions as unique iterations of art as theology. Within the two artist studies I hope to show the manner in which the spiritual sensibility in Hotere and Paul embodies this sense of confrontation with otherness. Through the process of reading their work I demonstrate the ways these two artists seek to gift their viewers with perspectives on the world that have the goal of transforming understandings. As Davey suggests, “hermeneutic dialogue aims at that understanding whereby its participant can begin to think differently about their own perspective as a consequence of having engaged with that of the other.”²⁶⁷

The hermeneutical principle is dialogical and dialectical. Davey turns to Gadamer’s influence: “The issue of understanding becomes dialectical: how does historical and cultural tradition ‘show’ itself in an art work and how does our interpretive engagement with what is shown change the latter’s historical nature?”²⁶⁸ This study also hopes to show how the particularities of what Hotere and Paul bring to light through their practices has a bearing on generalised understandings of the spiritual in art. Davey writes:

Only on the basis of difference are dialogue and understanding possible. By means of such differences we can both arrive at an appreciation of why in its approach to subject matter an historical art work is individual, and thereby gain a fuller consciousness about how our presuppositions about a subject matter differ from those of the work. Such dialogue expands and fills out more of the possibilities within a subject matter.²⁶⁹

According to Davey, hermeneutics as a theoretical paradigm, “does not offer a specific *theory* of art,” but offers ways of theorising “the experience of art.”²⁷⁰ The nature of hermeneutics avoids the capture or subordination by theoretical models, as the integrity

²⁶⁷ Davey, “Hermeneutics and Art Theory,” 445.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 439.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 443.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 439. Davey writes: “Hermeneutical aesthetics is not so much a theory in the modern sense but a constellation of different interpretive perspectives each of which gives us access to understanding another dimension of an art work. Hermeneutics may abjure a universal method but it does not renounce either methodical or rigorous interpretive approaches...” Ibid., 441.

of the art work expands upon or challenges the presuppositions through which we approach the work. The work is not placed in a secondary role, in terms of the interpretive outcome. The experience of the work is the locus of engagement yet discerning the historical context or artistic intention is not the sole purpose of the interpretation. At the same time, the historical context and discourse that informs the work, contributes to the understanding. As Davey argues, “individual aesthetic experience is therefore not a solitary monologue on private pleasure but an integral part of a shared historical discourse concerning the realization of meaning.”²⁷¹ There is a sense of added value here, as both the interpreter and the work are enriched and potentially transformed.

As the nature of interdisciplinarity is marked by difference, a hermeneutical principle provides a place from which to begin. It supports an ethical approach for the reader or interpreter, with the goal of transforming and enriching meaning, as the interpreter is confronted with otherness or difference. Thinking along with the art and practices of the two artists in this study also privileges their contributions as hermeneutical practices themselves. This project involves a shared process of reading along with Hotere and Paul to both highlight the manner in which their art and practices emerge as theopoetic practices, and how these practices have a bearing on generalised understandings of the spiritual in art.

The question of definitions

Some comment on the conceptual history of terms used in this discussion is a necessary task for any project that ranges around the margins of disciplinary allegiances. It is necessary, however, to note that the range of definitions applied by each discipline to the terminology involved in the wider topic of art and religion, is one side of the problem. On the other side, there is the problematic use of terms in too generic a sense.

Religion is commonly understood as an institutional or formal community of belief and the art generated within this context often exhibits didacticism and observes particular conventions attached to religious narrative or praxis. In this project I occasionally use

²⁷¹ Ibid., 444.

the word religious to encompass a more inclusive definition when a reference to Christianity does not suffice. While there has been a turn in recent scholarship, to examine religious themes in recent art, or to acknowledge the political and religious contexts as they emerge within religious studies and material culture, the distinction between religious and spiritual is commonly maintained in reference to the secularisation thesis of modernity. Spirituality is usually considered a personal disposition to the numinous or divine, often generally perceived as encompassing systems of belief and practice outside traditionally defined canons or communities of religion, and residing in an undercurrent of secular modernity. The definition of spiritual has its own genealogy of understanding, and a heavy ontological bias. I take a position that regards all reality as inherently spiritual in a holistic sense. When potential spiritual ‘experience’ occurs, it occurs in participation, or encounter, with divine action. My point at this stage, is that the spiritual must not be differentiated from matter in binary form as it also pertains to the whole material and immaterial realm of life in relation to the divine.

The connection between the rhetoric of transcendence as it is employed in curatorial projects or criticism, and the philosophical heritage of the relation between transcendence and immanence in modern art is another area worthy of attention. Transcendence is often employed in writing on religious or spiritual art, however, the definition of the term is often generalised, in like fashion to the words spiritual or sacred. There is a freight of tradition attached to these notions. Definitions and understandings vary depending on philosophical or theological consensus, theory, and historical situations. There is a spectrum of definitions of transcendence, ranging from the radical to the immanent.²⁷² The term transcendence is a fluid, loaded, multivalent, and often misconstrued, term employed within art criticism.

Specific iterations of these terms will emerge in discussion of art practices and interpretation, and assist in orientating the spiritual sensibilities of Hotere and Paul in

²⁷² For example, these may include: “the postmodern notion of transgression, the phenomenological notion of the other, the scientific notion of the impenetrable mystery of an infinite universe, the aesthetic notion of excess, the psychoanalytic notion of subjectivity...” Regina Schwartz, “Introduction: Transcendence: Beyond...”, *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* ed. Regina Schwartz (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), viii.

terms of the kinds of relationship between material and spiritual concerns that are present in their work. The materiality of art in relation to transcendence is thought to have different characteristics, depending on interpretation and art historical context. With an acknowledgment of the position of these terms within the historical context of late modernism, and more recent discussion on the configurations of immanence and transcendence within theory, art historical discourse and theology, a range of understandings of the spiritual in art might be explored.

The word ‘mysticism’ also carries a similar broad spectrum of definitions within the discourse of art history, and in general awareness. The tradition of mysticism in late modern art with which Paul and Hotere draw connections, will also be considered. As a rich source of spiritual writing and aesthetics, the mystical tradition of early Christianity has general and varied implications within the arts.

The ideological, philosophical, and theological connotations attached to the above terms in art history are multifarious. The importance of clarity with regard to the definitions of terms is apparent. So, interpretations of these terms will be situated within the specific context of each study. I go on to explore specific ways that Hotere and Paul qualify these terms.

An art focused approach

In this study I adopt an approach that places emphasis on the particular expressions of the two artists. My interpretive entrance to the study of Paul, as a form of permission, is through the door of her autobiographical accounts of spiritual and religious sensibilities and interests in her work. The details of Paul’s life and practice are more accessible. My interpretive introduction to Hotere’s work is through secondary literature on the spiritual and religious sensibilities of his work by art historians and critics. Hotere also made a statement that the interpretation of his work be left with the viewer. My focus on Hotere’s work is more demonstrative of what is going on in his work. These initial accounts provide me with access to a fuller examination of their sensibilities through which I can draw upon theological and art historical tradition to elucidate their

concerns. Given that the premise of this thesis prioritises the artist studies, I tend to adopt the role of an art historian in the first instance.

Regarding the concerns of theological content for this project, the position I maintain is implicit and dependant on what emerges from the artist studies. My engagement with discussion of ‘theology and art’ goes as far as working through the frames of reference that the artists employ, with attention to the way theological concepts are present in their work. Theological concepts sit unsystematically off centre or read as ad hoc. There is no single systematic account of a theology of art and I do not use art to form an overarching theological approach. In this way, the project adopts a theopoetic sensibility. Theology enters within the particularities of the art in question: I explore Hotere’s and Paul’s interests and art historical contexts that have the potential for specific theological considerations. Through this approach I glean connections to the heritage of theology or the spiritual in art.

My interpretive approach is not without acknowledgement of my own assumptions and interests. I approached the studies with an eye for certain inclinations I wanted to affirm within the art and practices of Hotere and Paul. Through aspects of Hotere’s and Paul’s art and practice, I respond to the theoretical positioning of an embodied relational and materially orientated definition of the spiritual in art. Theological discussion as it pertains to the artists must also account for the historical context of the artists.

Within my interpretive method is a desire to maintain an ethics of sensitivity towards the respective traditions involved in each study. The broader interpretive scope of this thesis necessarily involves alternative and sometimes conflicting scholarly positions regarding various metaphysical commitments and epistemological emphases. I try to take care not to confound positions, when met with incompatible worldviews. To place scholars of theology, with their allegiances to different schools of tradition, alongside scholars from outside of theology, in an interdisciplinary engagement, might present a potential danger of conflating different points of view. Acknowledging the premises of alternative worldviews within the same project, and ones that might not necessarily match the worldviews of my artist studies, feels like shaky ground. So my goal was to conduct a hermeneutic approach to the studies that acknowledges difference, and

respects the scholarly integrity of every contribution involved, in a process that is clear about the significance of the respective contributions of different scholars.

An approach that maintains this hermeneutical sensitivity, shifts the analytical emphasis away from a reading that is negatively critical of difference. Here I acknowledge Donna Haraway's methodology of diffraction. As Karen Barad argues: it is positively "diffractive" in a "suggestive [and] creative" fashion.²⁷³ Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin state this approach affirms the "relational nature of difference" where theories are treated "as forces from which other texts come into existence."²⁷⁴ It is an approach whereby one neither fully adopts nor rejects any single position, as Dolphijn and van der Tuin state: it allows for "...a relation between texts and scholars that is neither undutiful (affirming the Master by negating the work) nor dutiful (placing the "new" work in the Master's house)..."²⁷⁵ In this way, one might avoid the pitfall of reading theology "as scripture," while at the same time remaining "attentive" to particular theological insight.²⁷⁶ A self-critical method that values a form of diffractive reading and writing, is suggestive of an approach that would be inclusive of difference. While I do not adopt Haraway's specific use of this term, through positively embracing alternative positions I feel empowered to address Hotere's and Paul's unique contributions that traverse theological and art historical paradigms, without the need to expound upon systematic categories and singular metaphysical commitments.

²⁷³ Karen Barad, "'Matter Feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers.'" Interview with Karen Barad," in *New materialisms: Interviews and cartographies*, ed. Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 50. Karen Barad, following Donna Haraway, adopts "a method of diffractively reading insights through one another, building new insights, and attentively and carefully reading for differences that matter in their fine details, together with the recognition that there intrinsic to this analysis is an ethics that is not predicated on externality but rather entanglement. Diffractive readings bring inventive provocations; they are good to think with. They are respectful, detailed, ethical engagements." Ibid. See also Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), ch.2.

²⁷⁴ Dolphijn and van der Tuin, "'Matter Feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers.'" Interview with Karen Barad," 57.

²⁷⁵ Barad affirms this interpretation of her work. Ibid., 57-58.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 58.

Summary

My primary approach values hermeneutical sensitivity towards the development of a critical perspective, which involves a dialogical exchange between the components of this study, and specifically the encounter between the work of art and the reader (myself). I consider my own interpretive encounter and position as the reader/viewer through the process of writing. It is improvisational, yet deeply engaged with the material evidence that the artists provide. This process is a shared reading/writing-along-with Hotere and Paul. I emphasise their art and practice as theopoetic iterations of thinking through relations between art and religion that have their basis in the artists' lived experiences. Through this process of analysis, I show how their work has a bearing on generalised understandings of the spiritual in art and overcomes secular assumptions that accentuate divisions in the discourse between art and religion. I seek the support of enchantment narratives and the material turn in the humanities that privileges the site of material culture as a place to re-read the spiritual in art. Overcoming disembodied notions of the spiritual and drawing upon theological concepts and insight that highlight the specificity of the task of these artists is the goal.

The aim of my study is to add to the art historical reception of Hotere's and Paul's work that acknowledges the heritage of religion within modern art. I do not claim that there is a hidden heritage in their work, as mention of their religious and spiritual concerns is present in the literature, but I argue that it is worth exploring in a more specific way. A tradition in modern art that affirms the notion of aesthetic contemplation can be located within an interpretation of Hotere's and Paul's work in respective ways. Yet both artists also shift the analogy of aesthetic experience as religious experience beyond the subjective encounter. Their work emerged out of modernism, and arguably made contributions to postmodern art practices. A literary component looms large in both bodies of work. Their work is not explicitly religious in tone or content. They do not rely directly on religious iconography or tradition, although intimations of religious symbolism grace Hotere's oeuvre. I highlight, however, the way these artists engaged spiritual and religious content through the way they affirmed a relational, material and embodied sense of the divine in the world, and earthed in everyday life.

Hotere and Paul provide alternative perspectives on re-defining disembodied notions of the spiritual in art. Paul positioned herself as a painter/poet of the everyday. She resisted the idea of a disembodied notion of the spiritual in art through her attentiveness to everyday encounter and commitment to a view of the natural world infused with divine immanence. Hotere, on the other hand, engaged directly with traditions of abstract art that inherently embraced a notion of transcendence in art, yet the political tenor of his oeuvre, for example, shifts his work from the confines of a single theological interpretation. In Hotere's case, the heritage of an 'art world' negative theology and Māori spirituality are the major thematic lines of enquiry. Hotere's collaborative endeavours with poets, or use of liturgical symbolism, produced works that function for the viewers as elegies, as prayers, as songs, or as statements of protest that are outward facing; they provide the viewer with transformative sites of engagement. Both artists participated within an ethical paradigm that acknowledged the divine in relation to the world.

RALPH HOTERE

CHAPTER TWO

Hotere's spiritual sensibility: a literature review

Biographical introduction

Hone Papita Ruakuru (Ralph) Hotere (1931-2013) was born near Mitimiti, in the far north of New Zealand, of Te Aupōuri and Te Rawawa Māori descent. He is widely regarded as one of New Zealand's most significant artists. Educated at Hato Pētera College and Auckland Teacher's College, he moved to Dunedin in 1952, attending the Dunedin School of Art. He spent time as an arts advisor in the Bay of Islands. In 1961 he was awarded a New Zealand Art Societies Fellowship to attend the Central School of Art in London. From 1962-63 Hotere spent time in France and Italy, supported by a Karolyi International Fellowship. In 1969 he moved back to Dunedin, having been awarded the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship at the University of Otago. He remained in Dunedin for the rest of his life, establishing a studio in Port Chalmers and then Carey's Bay.

Hotere's work and style in brief

Hotere's art generously offers his audience "a panoply of human experience."¹ As writer Gregory O'Brien observes:

From the early expressionistic oils to the late minimalist iron works, Hotere's art offers an account of his loves and dislikes, his elations and his indignations. As a painter, he is capable of great fury... His art can smoulder and brood; it points accusingly at those who abuse power, yet often in the space of a single work can simultaneously strike an introspective or elegiac note. At other times, he can be euphorically romantic and decidedly amorous...²

Hotere's engagement with political current affairs is also a significant feature of his artistic endeavours. For art historian Hamish Keith, "Ralph Hotere was a warrior artist,"

¹ Gregory O'Brien, "Ralph Hotere: An intimate darkness" *The Listener*, (28 February 2013), n.p. <http://www.listener.co.nz/culture/arts/ralph-hotere-an-intimate-darkness/> (Accessed 27 September 2016).

² Ibid.

whose political standpoints were made with “elegance, power and beauty,” and an “easy humour” which brought forth the “immediate humanity of the man.”³

Hotere’s subject matter can be categorised under particular political, environmental, poetic and art historical interests in which he engaged with at various stages during his career. He made extensive use of the colour black. The visual themes and motifs he employed can also be read across his oeuvre as varied and interconnected iterations of a symbolic language. The symbolism and use of the Sacred Heart and the circle are two potent examples that carry significance for the focus of this study. His use of black is also predominant.

Hotere’s use of black is an initial departure point for the consideration of his spiritual sensibility. Referring to the depth of the black, as *prima materia*, O’Brien writes of the way Hotere “spent his life extracting meanings, messages and songs from the darkness of this world...a lifting of poetry from the most ordinary situations, a pulling of radiant wonders from out of the blackness.”⁴ He writes of the way Hotere “probed and interrogated the colour black, mining it for nuances, tremors of meaning.”⁵ O’Brien adds a list of allusions that darkness evokes: “intimations of mortality,” “a descent into the unknown, the mystery at the heart of both art and life,” “Māori and Western creation myths,” and following poet and long-time collaborator Bill Manhire, “the familiar night sky.”⁶ Manhire refers to the poet Federico Garcia Lorca (1898–1936) to illustrate Hotere’s sensibility: “All that has dark [or black] sounds has *duende*,” by which he meant the “‘mysterious power,’ of great art.”⁷

³ Hamish Keith in “Remembering Ralph Hotere. Tributes from Cilla McQueen, Grahame Sydney, Jeffrey Harris, Shane Cotton, Bill Manhire, Marti Friedlander, Mary Kisler and more,” in *The Listener*, (2 March, 2013): <http://www.listener.co.nz/culture/arts/remembering-ralph-hotere/> (30 June 2016).

⁴ O’Brien, “Ralph Hotere: An intimate darkness,” n.p.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bill Manhire in “Remembering Ralph Hotere,” n.p. See “Theory Function of the *Duende*,” in Federico Garcia Lorca, *Selected Poems*, trans. by Merryn Williams (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1992) 219 – 30 in Alan M. Gillmor ed. *Eagle Minds: Selected Correspondence of Istvan Anhalt and George Rochberg 1961 – 2005* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 1962. For Robert Motherwell, *duende* is “(the Andalusian term for that mysterious power ‘that all may feel and no philosophy may explain’).” He continues: “[Lorca] quotes approvingly a comment he once overheard at a concert of Manuel de Falla’s music: ‘Whatever has black sounds has real inspiration’ –for these black sounds, he adds, are the mystery and very root of art.” Motherwell, cited in Stephanie Terenzio,

Hotere's use of black can be read within both Māori and Western European art historical narratives. Kriselle Baker elucidates the depth of Hotere's Māori heritage, and its impact on Hotere's use of black, which encompassed understandings of mortality. She writes, "[if] 20th-century art and modernism are the gloss of his paintings, it is the tangi [sound] and the karanga [call] that haunt the depths of his work."⁸

The contextualisation of Ralph Hotere's spiritual sensibility

No object and certainly no painting, is seen in the same way by everyone, yet most people want an unmistakable meaning which is accessible to all in a work of art...It is the spectator which provokes the change and meaning in these works.⁹

This statement of Hotere's, reproduced in an exhibition catalogue *Zero, an exhibition of paintings* (1967) provides both an enabling principle and critical departure point for the following study. Here Hotere hands over the interpretive task to the viewer, arguably also providing the spectator with a given interpretive framework from which to draw,

Motherwell and Black (Connecticut: The William Benton Museum of Art, 1980), 148, cited in Kriselle Baker, "A World of Black and Light: Ralph Hotere 1968–1977," (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2009), 66.

⁸ Kriselle Baker, with Vincent O'Sullivan, in "Remembering Ralph Hotere," n.p. Tangi: 1. (verb) (-hia) to cry, mourn, weep, weep over. 2. (verb) (-hia) to sing, make a sound. 3. (verb) (-hia) to ring (of a bell), chime. 4. (noun) sound, intonation, mourning, grief, sorrow, weeping, lament, salute, wave. 5. (noun) pitch (music). 6. (noun) rites for the dead, funeral - shortened form of tangihanga. Karanga: 1. (verb) (-hia,-tia) to call, call out, shout, summon. 2. (noun) formal call, ceremonial call, welcome call, call - a ceremonial call of welcome to visitors onto a marae, or equivalent venue, at the start of a pōwhiri. The term is also used for the responses from the visiting group to the tangata whenua ceremonial call. Karanga follow a format which includes addressing and greeting each other and the people they are representing and paying tribute to the dead, especially those who have died recently. The purpose of the occasion is also addressed. Skilled kaikaranga are able to use eloquent language and metaphor and to encapsulate important information about the group and the purpose of the visit. *Māori Dictionary*: <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=karanga> (Accessed 23 November 2018).

⁹ Hotere writes: "The series ZERO may be called an object of visual meditation, the essence of meditation being a personal discovery in a seeming void. I have provided for the spectator a starting point, which, upon contemplation may become a nucleus revealing scores of new possibilities. No object and certainly no painting is seen in the same way by everybody, yet most people want an unmistakable meaning which is accessible to all in a work of art. It is the spectator who provokes the change and the meaning in these works." Ralph Hotere, *Zero, an exhibition of paintings*, exh. cat. (Auckland: Barry Lett Galleries, 1967), np, courtesy of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Artist Files: Ralph Hotere, Folder 4, Exhibition Catalogues, 1960–1974, in David M. Khan, "Figuring Desire: Psychoanalytic perspectives on the discourse surrounding Colin McCahon and Ralph Hotere," (PhD Diss., University of Canterbury, 2015), 119.

expressed in the form of “[objects] of visual meditation.”¹⁰ This statement also reflects an inherent modernist assumption that characterises art as an autonomous object of aesthetic contemplation. Hotere, as an artist informed by international modernism, the literary context of twentieth century New Zealand art, a Roman Catholic heritage, a political activist heart, and a Māori “soul,” offers his viewers a network of associations that both support and disrupt the metaphysical assumptions attached to the modernist art object.

Reflections on an unidentifiable or elusive artistic intention in Hotere’s work, consistently emerges in the literature.¹¹ Ian Wedde presents the following summary of interpretive tensions that characterise the body of critical and art historical engagement with Hotere’s work:

The art of Ralph Hotere is located in an international modernist context benchmarked by the black paintings of Ad Reinhardt. The art of Ralph Hotere derives essentially from the regional landscape of Mitimiti. Māoriness is not an issue in Hotere’s art: modernism liberated him from cultural specificity.

Māoriness is the soul of Hotere’s art: that’s why it’s not on the surface.¹²

Wedde identifies a “hidden narrative” in the historical reception of Hotere’s work, that has not managed to address the “gap between where Ralph had gone and what he’d come back to in the end.”¹³ He refers to the way Hotere’s work is often either singularly aligned with a particular affiliation, or re-visioned to account for some of the neglected aspects of his work, for example: “when the cross motifs in Ralph’s work are sheeted back unambiguously to the religious traditions of the Hāhi Katorika, the syncretic Catholic-Māori devolution of French Society of Mary missionaries via Mill Hill

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ian Wedde writes: “Hotere’s unwillingness to discuss his work has become mythical and this reticence is often elided with the sparseness of writing, as though the artist’s silence explains and amplifies the absence of critical record.” Wedde “Figure it Out,” *Landfall* 211 (Autumn 2006): 179, cited in Ibid., 385.

¹² Ian Wedde, “Trouble Spots: Where is Ralph Hotere?” in *Ralph Hotere: Black Light. Major Works Including Collaborations with Bill Culbert*, ed. Cilla McQueen, Priscilla Pitts, Mary Trewby, John Walsh and Ian Wedde (Wellington: Te Papa Press and Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2000), 52.

¹³ Ian Wedde, “O Salutaris: Between here and there,” in *Griffith REVIEW* 43 (Pacific Highways, 2014): unpaginated. <https://griffithreview.com/articles/o-salutaris/> (12 July 2017).

Brothers in the Hokianga...”¹⁴ In these cases the cross motifs are either explained away as formalist, or strictly aligned with Christian tradition. Wedde also identifies a “contradictory co-presence in Ralph’s work of austere understatement and rich content.”¹⁵ He addresses this question in terms of a dichotomy between a “provincial narrativity,” and the “cultural complexity and sophistication” of urbanity.¹⁶ For Wedde, Hotere’s work affirms “both...the dark austerities of Reinhardtian minimalism and the poetics of Spanish tenebrists,” for example.¹⁷ So for Wedde, “it’s not a question of how [Hotere] managed to juggle ‘there’ and ‘here’, periphery and centre. He closed the gap – he shut the question down.”¹⁸ In conclusion, Hotere’s individually astute and sophisticated oeuvre draws from a rich heritage. He cannot be confined to modernist tradition, and critical revision of his work must account for a multifaceted foundation of influence.

As one way of approaching Hotere interpretation to account for its complexity, Wedde highlights what he calls a “personal trace: the connection between how he works and how he lives [...]”¹⁹ Wedde also write of how Hotere “...showed [him] the intelligence in ordinary things. He showed how an appreciation of them went beyond ideology.”²⁰ Hotere’s ex-wife and poet Cilla McQueen, affirms this mode of practice through describing his life and work as “inextricably intertwined...he [worked] all the time, in his heart and in his mind” – “there’s no separation between art and life.”²¹ So here I consider a line of enquiry that emphasises a seamlessness between art and everyday life in Hotere’s practice, one that is both indebted to and disruptive of the metaphysics of modern abstract art.

I set up a platform for analysis through considering the myriad spiritual and religious readings of Hotere’s work as they emerge in the literature: Hotere’s Catholic heritage; the theological traditions attached to the modernist art historical lineage of abstract art;

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Wedde, “Trouble Spots: Where is Ralph Hotere?,” 59.

²⁰ Wedde, “Where is the art that does this?” in O’Brien, *Hotere: Out the Black Window*, 8.

²¹ Cilla McQueen in *Hotere*, directed by Merata Mita (New Zealand, 2001), DVD.

the employment of religious symbolism, and his engagement with the literary world. I also review Hotere's Māori heritage which supports a spiritual worldview that affirms notions of spiritual interconnectedness.

The task of interpreting Hotere's work with the explicit intention of reading through religious and theological assumptions and references is not undertaken without a certain amount of trepidation. My approach to the body of literature that spans Hotere's oeuvre has a limited horizon, as I scan for references to the spiritual or religious qualities of his work without immersing myself within the broader scope of critical debate. I do not intend this project to be a revisionary contribution to the literature. Instead, I consider the potential for a deeper and more nuanced theological understanding of his work that might add value to the critical reception of his oeuvre.

Hotere's religious and spiritual sensibility

The religious and spiritual sensibility of Hotere's work has not gone without notice in the art critical literature. But thoroughgoing analysis of his sensibility in critical religious or theological terms has not had much traction. Keith Stewart compares Hotere with Colin McCahon. While both artists have found "canonisation in contemporary art theology" Stewart also comments on the way Hotere's reticence, or silence, has "limited Hotere theology," in the sense that it is acknowledged but not much has been explored regarding the theological implications of his work.²² He states that, "Hotere's silence is more effective against the patter of McCahon's effusive ministry,"²³ and writes of Hotere's "quiet contemplation" that asks his viewers to "'Shut up and see' our internal universe."²⁴

O'Brien's essay on the religious sensibility in Hotere's work is sensitive and poetic, delineating Hotere's spiritual vision in light of several influences. He leaves plenty of space open for interpretation with his appeal to the apophatic mysticism of St John of

²² Keith Stewart, "I Do Ralph Hotere and Constructive Silence," in *Hotere: Seminar Papers from Into the Black*, ed. Roger Taberner and Ronald Brownson (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery, 1998), 9. (Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Hotere: Out the Black Window*, 1998 curated by Gregory O'Brien).

²³ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

the Cross and the notion of Grace which he reads as an undetermined yet defining characteristic of 'Hotere the artist.' O'Brien begins with an analogous reflection on the liturgical qualities of the Roman Catholic Tenebrae – as candles are lit and then extinguished during the week leading up to Easter. He identifies something of a European Catholic form of mysticism in Hotere's work: "[the] perennial issues of human suffering, loss and death...while a descent into – and immersion in – darkness, like the Holy Week ritual it draws us through that blackness towards a state of illumination, what Saint John of the Cross called 'lyrical ecstasy' or rapture."²⁵ O'Brien goes on to cite the poet Rafael Alberti, locating an affinity between the painter and the poet and the influence of Spanish Catholicism: "Besides being a painter of ... 'spiritual' and emotional darknesses, Hotere also captures the earthy, physical dimensions of what Alberti refers to as the 'negro de Espana' of all five senses: 'black sight / black sound / black smell / black taste / the black of the painter's touch'."²⁶

In a reading of Hotere's *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* (1991, ref 1. fig. 1) series, (which translates as "the black over the gold,"), O'Brien locates qualities of Catholicism that are "both elemental and mystical."²⁷ A window frame contains deep black with shimmering swatches of gold leaf and tiny clouds of brushed gold dust. Hotere's work here reflects something of the apophatic aesthetics of medieval mystical theology. It reads as a material and visual transposition of the language of the mystical poets.

O'Brien identifies an "earthy and sensual" characteristic to Hotere's religious sensibility: "Hotere's paintings are icons of a religion in which sensuality and earthly beauty, rather than being extinguished, are brought to a kind of fruition."²⁸ Colour is accentuated in surfaces of black – shot through with light. The viewer's embodied response to Hotere's work is also important. O'Brien highlights the nature of the viewer's response in light of Hotere's collaborative endeavours and received "correspondences" between artistic disciplines: "We *hear* colours; we *see* sounds; we

²⁵ Gregory O'Brien, "Tenebrae – Transfigured Night: Ralph Hotere, a viable religious art and its traditions," in *Ralph Hotere: Black Light. Major Works Including Collaborations with Bill Culbert*, 28.

²⁶ Rafael Alberti, *To Painting: Poems by Rafael Alberti*, trans. by Carolyn L Tipton, (Northwestern University Press, Illinois, 1997) in *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁷ O'Brien, "Tenebrae – Transfigured Night," 31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

see, read and listen to words.”²⁹ What emerges here is a definite sense of an earthy, embodied and material language for a spiritual sensibility.

O’Brien also notes the characteristics of a continental European type of Catholicism in Hotere’s upbringing in Mitimiti³⁰ – and as Hotere went on to spend much time in Europe, this informed the content and sensibility of his practice. According to O’Brien, the influence of Hotere’s heritage on his art also assists the viewer in reading Hotere’s work – in the sense that “Māori and Catholic aspects of his art [can be interpreted] as mutually inclusive.”³¹

For O’Brien, the Māori and Western religious and spiritual influences in Hotere’s work are “broad and non-sectarian...subtly formed and nuanced by [Hotere’s] background.”³² O’Brien characterises Hotere’s contributions as indirect iterations of spiritual and western tradition – where secular and religious concerns interact. In relation to traditions and narratives of iconographic religious art, Hotere’s art is defined as “resolutely ‘open’ and unemphatic.”³³ Intuition drives Hotere’s work where “physical and emotional ‘content’” meets the “symmetry and refinements” of religious art and thought.³⁴ O’Brien describes the spiritual momentum of Hotere’s works as “not one of enabling salvation nor, for that matter, solace, but of enlivening and deepening the

²⁹ O’Brien writes: “Since the early 1970s, Hotere has worked alongside writers, musicians, composers, metal-workers, architects, dramatists as well as other painters to achieve his own ‘correspondences’.” Ibid., 36.

³⁰ O’Brien outlines the relationship that emerged within the Marist Order and the Māori (Bishop Pompallier – Catholicism in Northland) as different to that which emerged with Protestant missionaries in other parts of the country. Drawing on Philip Turner’s findings, O’Brien identifies an “oppositional stance to mainstream settler culture,” which did not dislocate Māori from traditional social structure. Philip Turner, ‘The Politics of Neutrality: the Catholic Mission and the Māori 1838–1870’, unpublished MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1986 iv, in Ibid., 32.

³¹ Ibid., 32–33. Mane-Wheoki elaborates: “Hone Papita Raukura Hotere was brought up in a devout Roman Catholic family. His father, Tangirau, was a katikita (catechist); his mother, Ana Maria, was named for St Ann and her daughter, St Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Hahi Katorika tradition into which he was born near Mitimiti and baptised in 1931 had originated with French missionaries of the Society of Mary, under the leadership of Bishop Pompallier, active in Northland from 1838. (Hotere’s first two Christian names, Hone Papita, are transliterations, not of John the Baptist but of Jean-Baptiste, which was the Bishop’s name.) Although the French Marists had been succeeded at Mitimiti by an English order in the 1880s, the Mill Hill priests who served there had come from mainland Europe...He completed his secondary school education at St Peter’s Māori College (Hato Petera) in Auckland.” Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, “The Black Light Paradox: The Sumptuous Austerity of Ralph Hotere’s Art,” *Art New Zealand*, 98 (Autumn 2001): 73.

³² O’Brien, “Tenebrae – Transfigured Night,” 27.

³³ Ibid., 30.

³⁴ Ibid.

dilemmas posed by life and its intrinsic ‘other’, death.”³⁵ Hotere’s inclusion of symbolism – in particular the circle (as a symbol of the Eucharist) and the x shaped cross (the *crux decussata*) – are also ‘open’ symbols and not strictly confined to particular traditions of interpretation but are informed by the religious and the political concerns within as O’Brien puts it, a “Māori-Catholic nexus.”³⁶ The complexity of Hotere’s “Māori-Catholic nexus,” which sustains his political concerns, also encompasses the spiritual significance of the natural environment.³⁷

While noting Hotere as an artist at the forefront of the contemporary Māori art movement,³⁸ Mane-Wheoki writes, “[yet] of our indigenous artists he could also be said to be, paradoxically, the country’s most European.”³⁹ Mane-Wheoki tracks the influence of modernist European religious art in Hotere’s early figurative works – citing a painting of Christ that appears on the cover of *Te Ao Hou* (1959). He refers to the influence of Henri Matisse’s work in the Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence. Elements of a specifically Spanish aesthetic are drawn out in reference to the work *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* as Mane-Wheoki reflects on the exhibition *Black Light* (2000-2001)⁴⁰ as “redolent

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 33.

³⁷ Mane-Wheoki writes: “When his mother, Ana Maria, died in 1972, his great friend Hone Tuwhare, also a man of the north, and later, like Ralph, an inaugural Icon of the New Zealand Arts Foundation in 2003, inflected his elegiac poem *A Fall of Rain at Mitimiti* (published in 1974) with imagery drawn from the church, and its liturgy and the natural environment. Ralph’s father, Tangirau Hotere, died in 1982 and the whanau gathered in Tūmoana for his tangi. In her memorial poem *Tangi at Mitimiti*, Cilla McQueen compiles snatches of words to convey the splintering of emotion as the ancient rituals are re-enacted. She mentions the meeting house and the urupā Hione (Zion) but turns for solace to the natural environment – the beach, Moetangi (the stream), a stand of mangrove trees, the mountains, a hovering godwit and ‘of course/the cold rain’. Ralph quoted four lines from this poem on his drawing *From Tangi at Mitimiti – a poem by Cilla McQueen*. In his series *Towards a church window at Mitimiti* (1982), Ralph names locations along the West Coast of Muriwhenua, including Tarakeha, the mountain that looms over the marae, and the whare Tūmoana.” Mane-Wheoki in “Remembering Ralph Hotere,” n.p.

³⁸ Shane Cotton writes of the impact that the work *Black Phoenix*: “Seeing this work was a defining moment for me and hugely influential. It caused me to question the very nature of contemporary Māori art, and to re/consider its place within New Zealand art practice.” Shane Cotton in “Remembering Ralph Hotere,” n.p. Mane-Wheoki draws attention to the exhibition, *Korurangi: New Māori Art*, Auckland Art Gallery, 1995.

³⁹ Mane-Wheoki, “The Black Light Paradox,” 72. “Ralph’s upbringing as a Māori and in the Roman Catholic faith (Mitimiti is a stronghold of Te Hahi Katorika, the Catholic Church) furnished his sensibility with mystical imagery, language and concepts from a dual heritage.” It is in the whare tupuna, Tūmoana, on Matihetihe marae, and in the church, Hato Hemi (St James), that the most sacred events in the cycle of life are played out for Ralph’s whānau, hapu and iwi.” Mane-Wheoki in “Remembering Ralph Hotere,” n.p.

⁴⁰ The exhibition *Ralph Hotere: Black Light. Major Works Including Collaborations with Bill Culbert* was produced in a partnership between The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and the

of the continuing emotional and aesthetic appeal on Hotere of Spain and its great tradition of Catholic art...the sumptuous austerity of [Francisco de Zurbarán], the courtly elegance of [Diego Velazquez], the velvety blackness of the Spanish tenebrists, and the gilded altars of Spain's cathedrals."⁴¹

While the Spanish tenebrists might have an oblique correlation with Hotere's work *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, and the aesthetics of the tenebrae tradition is useful stylistic interpretive lens for these works, an interpretation of these works through theological tradition is the more obvious road. Mane-Wheoki affirms O'Brien's theological intimations via St John of the Cross,⁴² also stating that Hotere's background informed an oeuvre "[steeped] in Catholic liturgy, theology, sacramentalism, mysticism, iconography and Latin texts..."⁴³ Mane-Wheoki names Hotere's riff on the motif of the Sacred Heart as one example – The Stations of the Cross and the Requiem being other recurring interests. These aspects of Hotere's work are more promising for categorising spiritual content.

David Eggleton also reads Hotere's work as "inherently Christian," writing, "it's about love, pain, tenderness, sacrifice; but it's also about ambiguity, indeterminacy, and mystery."⁴⁴ Eggleton's reading of Hotere's religious sensibility is immediate. He sees his work as a "form of meditation" that, like the experience of viewing Reinhardt, asks the viewer to slow down.⁴⁵ Eggleton draws attention to the sacred geometry present in Hotere's work, the perfect circle within a square, which lends itself to a symbolic interpretation, at a basic level, of the unity of the heavens and the earth. Eggleton also refers to Hotere's association with Māori nationalism, and his *Te Whiti* (1972-1973, see

Dunedin Public Art Gallery. It was curated by Gwynneth Porter, John Walsh and Ian Wedde. Dunedin Public Art Gallery, March-May 2000; Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, June-August 2000; The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, October 2000-February 2001.

⁴¹ Mane-Wheoki, "The Black Light Paradox," 74. The black and gold attire of the Spanish Monarchy, and late 16th Century western European fashion of the Spanish courtiers and wealthy Protestants, also come to mind. My attention was also drawn to the black and gold armor in Titan's portraits of the Spanish monarchy, *Philip the 2nd Philip II in Armor*, (1548) *An elderly Karl V (Don Carlos I of Spain)*, and *Charles V* (1533).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁴ David Eggleton, "Ralph Hotere: Shadowing the Sublime," *Art New Zealand* 81 (Summer 1996-97): 73.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

ref. 2)⁴⁶ series as a particular “reaffirmation of Māoritaonga.”⁴⁷ For him, Hotere’s works are “Māori millennial tabernacles.”⁴⁸ Hotere’s *Black Window* series, including that of *Lo Negro Sombre Lo Oro*, are referred to by Eggleton as “spiritual objects;” Hotere “then, is an altar-painter.”⁴⁹ Eggleton goes on: “In these works you can almost hear him thinking his way through the...devotional silence of them.”⁵⁰ Eggleton calls them “redemptive cabinets...layered with absences rich in contemplative possibilities.”⁵¹ The notion of redemption is located within emptiness as a framework for contemplation. So here emerges an aesthetics of contemplation as a correlation to spiritual contemplation. Eggleton’s writing on Hotere also explicitly brings out these qualities. His employment of religious terms is integrated within his interpretive stance. The line between poetic writing and accurate theological expression is a question that comes to light, but Eggleton seems to exemplify a kind of theopoetic mode that complements Hotere’s work.

Another important influence on the spiritual sensibility of Hotere’s work, is the heritage of modern abstract painting. O’Brien delineates Hotere’s oblique relation to western histories of the spiritual in modernist abstract art, remarking that Hotere “unlikely...set out to consciously pioneer a ‘spiritual’ art the way such painters as Kasimir Malevich

⁴⁶ This series was commissioned by James Mack for the show *Taranaki Saw it All: The Story of Te Whiti O Rongomai of Parihaka*, at the Waikato Art Museum in 1973. Hotere drew from a range of textual sources for these works, including excerpts from John Caselberg’s *The Voice of the Maori* (1969), Dick Scott’s *The Parihaka Story* (1954), and John White’s *Ancient History of the Maori* (1887). The small works contain both Māori and English translations, and include reference material on the paintings themselves. O’Brien refers to this series as a “small library of open books –an unsequential series of pages to be contemplated in the tradition of the medieval manuscript...” O’Brien, “Ploughing: Ralph Hotere’s ‘Te Whiti’ Series,” in *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance*, exhib. cat. (Wellington: City Gallery Wellington, Victoria University and Press Parihaka Pā Trustees, 2001), 151. “After the wars of the 1860s, large areas of land were confiscated from Māori. In Taranaki, resistance to the ongoing loss of land, and to European occupation of it, was centred at Parihaka. It was here that the prophets Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi led a campaign of passive resistance.” John Wilson, “History - War, expansion and depression,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/artwork/1470/comet-over-mt-taranaki-and-parihaka> (accessed 22 November 2018).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 69-70. Taonga is defined as “1. (noun) property, goods, possession, effects, object. 2. (noun) treasure, anything prized - applied to anything considered to be of value including socially or culturally valuable objects, resources, phenomenon, ideas and techniques.” *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?keywords=taonga> (Accessed 20 September 2018)

⁴⁸ Eggleton, “Ralph Hotere: Shadowing the Sublime,” 73.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

and Wassily Kandinsky did,”⁵² yet at the same time, Hotere found his place within the “artistic whakapapa⁵³ of modernism.”⁵⁴ Again, O’Brien reiterates the sense that Hotere does not explicitly forge statements of spiritual direction or guidance, yet the metaphysical interpretive implications of his work are still present.

O’Brien concludes his *Tenebrae* essay by aligning Hotere’s work with a notion of grace, which he defines in contrast to a didactic or proclamatory religious mode of expression: “We find the paintings dealing with a ‘spirituality’ that ebbs and flows between all of humanity – a quality not dependent on individual belief. This non-sectarian, universalist quality is usually called Grace.”⁵⁵ O’Brien’s definition of grace directs a reading of Hotere’s work that tends towards contemplation rather than proclamation, essentially maintaining an openness of interpretation. The notion of grace within Hotere’s work also manifests within his generosity as an artist – he is both generous to the viewer, and in his tendency to gift his work to those around him. In summary, O’Brien affirms Hotere’s ability to make art in which “viewers might realise their own ‘spirituality.’”⁵⁶

According to O’Brien, Hotere’s “concentration on broader nuances,” positions his work within the “mystical wing of the Church rather than with the theological wing.”⁵⁷ Yet while the mystical sensibility of Hotere’s work “...comes close to the lyrical ecstasy of Saint John of the Cross...[it] always remains close to the everyday life of [the]

⁵² O’Brien, “Tenebrae – Transfigured Night,” 28.

⁵³ Whakapapa: “4. (noun) genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent - reciting whakapapa was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. It is central to all Māori institutions. There are different terms for the types of whakapapa and the different ways of reciting them including: tāhū (recite a direct line of ancestry through only the senior line); whakamoe (recite a genealogy including males and their spouses); taotahi (recite genealogy in a single line of descent); hikohiko (recite genealogy in a selective way by not following a single line of descent); ure tārewa (male line of descent through the first-born male in each generation).” *Māori Dictionary* <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=wakapapa> (Accessed 20 September 2018).

⁵⁴ O’Brien, “Tenebrae – Transfigured Night,” 30. Jonathan Mane-Wheoki elaborates: “Affinities with Carl Andre, Alberto Burri (and Arte Povera, generally), Jim Dine, Jean Dubuffet, Jasper Johns (though Hotere’s *Black Union Jack* works of 1981 seem like a mordant reversal of Johns’ ‘Stars and Stripes’ paintings of 1954-55) and Donald Judd’s metal boxes and shelves, Malevich, Robert Mangold, Matisse, Reinhardt, the suave viscosity of Pierre Soulages, and the ‘white writing’ of Tobey may be discerned in Hotere’s art.” Mane-Wheoki, “The Black Light Paradox,” 91.

⁵⁵ O’Brien “Tenebrae – Transfigured Night,” 36-37.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁷ For O’Brien, an artist like McCahon fulfils the example of a theological art or “faith.” Hotere, in a mystical vein, is an example an “artist of Grace.” *Ibid.*, 37.

painter...”⁵⁸ This point is important. Mark Young writes of a visit to Hotere’s studio where he encountered the life and art of Hotere’s practice. Paintings in progress, sat alongside finished works. Young also noticed a painting that had been fashioned into a table, and a blotter pad painted black with the blue corners of the paper still exposed.⁵⁹ Hotere’s material poetry is grounded in everyday life. As O’Brien argues:

Like the best *religious art* ...Ralph Hotere’s work disrupts distinctions between subject and object, secular and religious, art and life. Like the Holy Week Tenebrae, it takes us into a chamber of darkened, opaque reverberations. Then we are led beyond these enclosed, inner spaces to the natural environment, which has its own language, its own spiritual sense – be it Mitimiti or Port Chalmers or the south of France.⁶⁰

O’Brien lists three areas of influence that pertain to Hotere’s spiritual sensibility:

First, “as a Te Aupouri Māori, he was brought up in a multi-faceted cultural and spiritual milieu, with the natural environment an intrinsic and powerful component...[second] the European Catholic tradition, as imparted to his hapū at Mitimiti by the Mill Hill priesthood...[third,] the ground-breaking modernists – among them Mondrian and Reinhardt – [who] left figuration far behind and repositioned art so it could address and explore human spirituality in new ways...”⁶¹

These historical and contextual influences can all be established as central contributions to Hotere’s life and work. My reading of Hotere’s work considers aspects of these influences: his relationship with the heritage of the spiritual in art in the work of modern abstract painters, the visual and symbolic heritage of Roman Catholicism often imbued in his work, and the spiritual importance of the natural world within his Māori heritage.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁹ Mark Young, “Love plus Zero/no Limit”, *Ascent*, vol. 1, no. 3, (April 1969): 21.

⁶⁰ O’Brien, “Tenebrae – Transfigured Night,” 37.

⁶¹ Ibid., 30.

Hotere's modernist whakapapa

[Hotere's] series *Black Paintings* [1968, ref 3.] has been likened in its extreme reductivism to the *Black Paintings* of Ad Reinhardt (from whose 1964 lecture given at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, which Hotere missed, he quotes in the catalogue of his 'Zero' paintings show at the Barry Lett Gallery in 1967); at the same time Hotere's shiny black, reflective lacquered surfaces, each featuring a perfectly centred, full-length, sharp, slit-like cross painted in one of the seven colours of the solar spectrum, are the very antithesis of the American painter's self-effacing images.⁶²

Wedde approaches the question of Hotere's artistic intention through a comparative reading of a selection of cruciform works. Wedde refers to Hotere's *Black Painting* (1967- 68, ref. 4) alongside similar works done by Milan Mrkusich, Gordon Walters and Richard Thompson, highlighting the tensions between alternative readings: if interpretation begins with the knowledge of Hotere's Catholic background, how does an interpretation of (the cross) change in light of formalism (the quartered canvas)? Here Wedde brings up the question of the relationship between formalism, metaphysics and religion and how one reading of their work might annul or alter another kind of reading. Wedde's writing on Hotere's work is demonstrative of the way interpretation shifts and is enriched when the different aspects of Hotere's practice are read together. Hotere's use of found materials, references to the landscape, and the political import or activist response to real life situations, frame and re-frame the artist's position. But as Wedde reiterates, one "cannot escape from this speculative net of associations."⁶³ Interpretive lines move in multiple directions. Wedde concludes:

In the collected company of other art (including, in this particular collection, the company of Ad Reinhardt), the formalist cross of Ralph Hotere's *Black Painting*

⁶² Mane-Wheoki, "The Black Light Paradox," 76. Mane-Wheoki also contextualises Hotere's work within the influence of Art Brut: "a movement associated with Jean Dubuffet, Tachisme, an aggressively physical method of painting, and Nouveau Réalisme, a loose association of artists (including Arman, Jean Tinguely, César, Christo and Yves Klein) who assembled *objets trouvés* (discards) are all aspects of contemporary French art with which Hotere can be linked during [the] formative period of his career." Ibid., 74.

⁶³ Wedde, "Trouble Spots: Where is Ralph Hotere?," 58.

is immediately vivid, even social, in ways that it cannot be when the demands of a unique narrative meaning exile it from the company of its dialect companions.⁶⁴

An exhibition entitled “Māori minimalism and international influence / Te toi tahanga Māori me te whakaawenga mai i tawhiti,” (31 August 2016 - 26 February 2017) at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, included a selection of Hotere’s paintings, some works by the sculptor Matt Pine, and Reinhardt’s *Portfolio: 10 Screenprints* (1966, ref. 5). This exhibition served to highlight the dialectical relationship between Hotere and Reinhardt.

The selection of Hotere’s black paintings included his colour spectrum *Black Paintings* (1968, ref. 3), with pencil thin coloured crosses that intersected the planes of black; *Black Painting XI, from “Malady” a poem by Bill Manhire*, (1970, ref. 6) and the screenprint, *Red on Black, From the portfolio: Barry Lett Multiples* (1969, ref. 7). The presentation of Hotere’s works alongside Reinhardt’s within this exhibition, highlight both connections and dissimilarities between their works. I focussed primarily on the consideration of Reinhardt’s work on my visit to this exhibition, and found that the similarities between Hotere’s and Reinhardt’s works are conceptual and historical and do not elicit the same phenomenological or perceptual responses. Hotere’s works on display did not engage me in the same way as Reinhardt’s ocular facilitations. Their respective works ask the viewer to participate in entirely different physical and visual modes, and the discrimination is primarily located within their respective uses of gloss and matt surfaces.

The notion of contemplation, as a feature in the work of Reinhardt, can be drawn in comparison with Hotere’s black: “Black was ‘intellectuality and conventionality,’ the ‘medium of the mind’ (Redon), ‘the divine dark’ (Meister Eckhardt), the Tao ‘dim and dark’ (Lao Tzu).”⁶⁵ Eastern and Western mysticisms converge in Reinhardt’s black

⁶⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁶⁵ Reinhardt, unpublished notes on ‘black,’ Archives of American Art in Lucy Lippard, *Ad Reinhardt* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1981), 172.

paintings, as “objects of disinterested contemplation,” that at the same time are removed from being necessarily religious.⁶⁶

Baker makes a fairly direct correlation between the “artistic” mysticism of Reinhardt’s black and Hotere’s work:⁶⁷ “What is clear, however, is that these works have a spiritual dimension in the same way that Reinhardt’s works have a spiritual dimension.”⁶⁸ While Baker does not defend or elaborate upon the definition of this “spiritual dimension” specifically, she refers to the way these works engender a contemplative state, defined as “meditative.”⁶⁹ Importantly, this meditative notion of the spiritual in Hotere’s art is also understood, and emphasised by Baker, in connection with everyday life. She also argues that in contrast to the introspective turn within the artists of romanticism, naming James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) as her guide, Hotere’s work asks the viewer to remain within the world – to “feel [the] world more acutely.”⁷⁰

This notion of contemplation can also be understood in relation to the inward turn of the Romantics. Baker draws upon thematic depictions of night within Romanticism, to consider another art historical and literary genealogical influence in Hotere’s black paintings. Both negative and positive attributions of night are considered: a melancholy and turbulence, or refuge and introspection – “a time of calm and tranquillity.”⁷¹ Baker makes the link between the meditative quality of the black lacquered surfaces of Hotere’s painting with the meditative space of the night: “In a continuum with Romanticism, what the *Black Paintings* in particular direct us to with their buffed and

⁶⁶ Barbara Rose, in *Ad Reinhardt* (New York: Marlborough Gallery, 1970), 19 in Lippard, *Ad Reinhardt: Paintings*, 174.

⁶⁷ Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 115.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶⁹ Baker draws on Reinhardt commentary: Alfred Barr, who writes of Reinhardt’s works as ““objects of contemplation”” that ““invite meditation.”” Alfred Barr, Junior, quoted in Stephanie Rosenthal, *Black Paintings* (Munich: Haus der Kunst, 2006), 35, cited in *Ibid.* Then she refers to Barbara Rose: ““like the hypnotic patterns of Islamic decoration or the abstract diagrams of tantric Buddhism: they induce a state of contemplation which may be defined as meditative.”” *Ad Reinhardt, Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: Viking, 1975), 82, cited in *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Baker continues: “Hotere’s abstraction is not an attempt to obscure the external world but rather to make us feel that world more acutely. In the black of *Requiem* with its repetition of text and tautly stretched chords of colour there is a deep keening grief, the emotion of which is firmly grounded in the reality of a world in which death is inevitable and always present.” *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

reflective surfaces is the contemplation of self, both metaphoric and literal.”⁷²

Moreover, Hotere’s works often contained the literal reflection of the viewer. In this sense the viewer becomes part of the work and is asked to confront the presence of their person in a participatory fashion. Young comments, “we all participate” in Hotere’s “personal & singular view of the universalities that surround us, that constitute our being...”⁷³ It is a self-conscious meditative space, but his work also asks more of the viewer as they see themselves within the context of wider concerns.

The presence of the everyday also grounds Hotere’s work. A connection between everyday life and spiritual transcendence in Hotere’s work can be considered in conversation with the work of Antoni Tàpies. Baker makes a comparison between their respective employments of black. In Tàpies work, the political, located in an “everyday ordinariness,” is coupled with a notion of the spiritual.⁷⁴ For Baker, Hotere’s use of the window frame, or corrugated iron and industrial materials, for example, “champions a working-class aesthetic” and “[yet] within the banality...Hotere, like Tàpies, manages to find a spiritual transcendence that is deeply contemplative.”⁷⁵ Baker writes:

As we have seen, Hotere says ‘I have provided for the spectator a starting point, which upon contemplation may become a nucleus revealing scores of new possibilities’.⁷⁶ It is a starting point for Hotere that, in spite of the modernism and often highly refined finish of his black, is always grounded in the everyday.⁷⁷

Mane-Wheoki also draws attention to the work of Tàpies as “the inheritor of the rich culture of Catholic Spain with which Hotere has demonstrated a particular empathy.”⁷⁸ For Mane-Wheoki, Tàpies is a significant conversation partner for Hotere. Here also, the motifs of Catholic liturgical symbolism support this grounding in the everyday.

⁷² Ibid., 75.

⁷³ Young, “Love plus Zero/no Limit,” 21.

⁷⁴ Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 71.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁶ Hotere, ‘Zero’ (exhibition list), n.p., in Ibid.

⁷⁷ Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 72.

⁷⁸ Mane-Wheoki, “The Black Light Paradox,” 91. Mane-Wheoki also identifies a correlation with Tàpies’s use of the crux decussate.

Noting Hotere's interest in the relationship between Spanish artists, including Tàpies, and their use of black, Baker concludes:

It is at once a political black, one that champions the everyday working-class world; a black of spiritual contemplation, of Catholicism and candlelit prayer; a black saturated with the grief of human misery and of death and the loss that accompanies death; and a black that allows us a sense of the transcendence that Hotere makes it possible to see in the material of industry and everyday life.⁷⁹

Baker's thesis contextualises Hotere's 'black light.' She provides the art historical rhetoric or framework for a sense of the spiritual in Hotere's work and a theological reading of these notions should properly begin from within these parameters.

Hotere's Māori-Catholic nexus

I argue for the potential of reading the presence of Catholic symbolism and liturgical motifs in Hotere's work as a transposition of material religion within the context of fine art. These motifs add an explicitly religious tone to the heritage of mysticism within modernist abstraction. Reading Hotere's works as a form of religious or devotional art has been contested by O'Brien, who prefers to consider the spiritual content of Hotere's work as open to the viewer's interpretation. But the theoretical implications of reading these works as a form of material religion, contributes to an understanding of these works as material objects beyond a generalised form of spiritual disembodied contemplation. The religious symbols he employs in his work make strong statements. What they are not, are mere visual embellishments; something must be made of them. That being said, the visual language of Christianity, Catholicism in particular, has a rich heritage of symbolism from which to draw. Hotere's decision to include these motifs naturally reflects his heritage and upbringing. The question of a religious context for these works comes to the fore. Hotere adds an explicit religious tone to the void of the abstract monochrome. His work is postmodern in this sense. He returns to pre-modern iconography and so situates his work within a Christian mystical tradition.

⁷⁹ Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 73.

The colour black also has a cultural genealogy associated with death and grief. Understanding Hotere's black as a form of elegy, can be interpreted in comparison with Robert Motherwell's reading of black, which includes "the black of everyday life in Spain."⁸⁰ Baker presents Motherwell's thoughts on Lorca's notion of *pena negra*, (black grief) and the notion of *duende* as something that can be understood in musical terms:⁸¹ "Whatever has black sounds has real inspiration"—for these black sounds, he adds, are the mystery and very root of art. There is something almost divine or inspired, then, about a grief so pure and deep as to be a *black* grief."⁸² Baker makes another connection to Motherwell's *Elegies to the Spanish Republic* (1971 and 1948, ref. 8-9), and Rafael Alberti's writing on Motherwell's "black:"

Motherwell Black

Motherwell black / A profound compact entered into with the night
 Black black elegy / Black with black coagulated blood / With lime of bones
 outlining form
 Armbands of mourning / Black flags . . .
 Weeping endless black secret black
 Black bottomless terror / Black tongue cut without reply / Oh pervasive black
 without possible exit
 Black of the gypsy's irremediable curse
 I can enter you black dissolved in tears . . .

Rafael Alberti, 1980.⁸³

⁸⁰ Motherwell writes: "In Hispanic countries you see Black everywhere . . . practically every woman over fifty is in black . . . a Spanish funeral hearse, when I was young, was enamelled black, with black horses and black plumes . . . if you think of Spanish painting itself—not only Goya—but Murillo, Zuburán and the whole of 17th-century Spanish painting, it's filled with black . . . When you walk out of the bright sunlight into a Spanish house, into the interior for a moment you can't see, because the contrast between the outside and inside is so profound." Motherwell, cited in Terenzio, *Motherwell*, 137, cited in *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸¹ The connection Baker makes between music and painting, she draws from Motherwell's interest in the "Symbolist principle of *correspondence*," which is a form of illustrating a poem in painting that is not a direct representation of the imagery. Jack Flam, *Motherwell* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991), 21, cited in *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸² Motherwell, cited in Terenzio, *Motherwell*, 148, cited in *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸³ Rafael Alberti, cited in Terenzio, *Motherwell*, 7, cited in *Ibid.*, 64.

On a thematic level, death and Catholicism are aligned in Hotere's works.⁸⁴ Baker leads her readers to a conclusion that draws together the elements of sound with the Māori language, the notion of death and the ceremonial format of the tangi in the work of *Godwit/Kuaka* (1977, ref. 10, fig. 2). One of her concluding comments on Hotere's "Māori-Catholic nexus" is noted in relation to Hotere's *Requiem* (from 1973, see ref. 11, fig. 3) paintings and "the sonorous tones of the waiata [song]" within his *Godwit/Kuaka* work: "The sounds of the recited language used in *Godwit/Kuaka* are the tonal equivalent of the *Requiem* and psalms which underscored many of [Hotere's] works in the decade prior."⁸⁵

It is...not only the meaning of the words which is important but also the sound of that reading. The rhythm of the words, like the repetition of particular phrases in *Requiem* and *Malady* become in the context of these works the sound of mourning. It is a sobbing or cry that is the equivalent of the cry of the godwit referred to in *Godwit/Kuaka* and the sound it makes as it rises up, calling out in fright. This is the tangi or cry of the godwit that is linked to the threat of death expressed within the poem, and to the tangi that is the wailing which marks and commemorates the passing of loved ones, of other tribal members and of ancestors.⁸⁶

Baker provides a thorough picture of Hotere's Catholic heritage and addresses the notion of black within the context of the genealogical narratives of Hotere's Te Aupōuri heritage. Hotere's negotiations between dark and light, as Baker puts it, come from his, "personal and tribal history and an upbringing in which Māori understanding of the natural world and of the transition of light into dark is embedded within tribal lore and mythology, as it is too within the Catholicism in which he was raised."⁸⁷ The Catholicism of Hotere's heritage allowed room for traditional Māori spirituality.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 280.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁸⁸ Baker notes Maori Marsden's view on the compatibility of sacramental notions: "'Māori possessed a sacramental system which included sacraments parallel to those of the Christian church.'" Maori Marsden, "God, Man and Universe: A Māori View," in *Te Ao Hurihuri: Aspects of Māoritanga*, ed. Michael King (Auckland: Reed Books, 1992), 124, cited in *Ibid.*, 214.

Hotere's *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, with the predominant absence of text, but with recurring Catholic symbolism, transposes the notion of mystical contemplation within a Māori- Catholic sensibility.

Conclusions

Art writers and commentators on Hotere's work tend to refer to broad categories of spiritual notions in his work, implicitly framing them within the entrenched heritage of Western dualist thought. The majority of the critical literature on Hotere addresses the religious sensibility of his work lyrically and sensitively, leaving room to explore the religious traditions associated with his work. A thematic or stylistic reading of a material religion in Hotere's work comes to the fore. My treatment of the literature and the shape of this study will support a reading of Hotere's work that accounts for a multifaceted influence of contributing spiritual traditions.

Hotere's 'Māori-Catholic nexus' can be interpreted as a mysticism of the 'dark night of the soul,' anchored by the fluid iteration of modernist aesthetic restraint, and the deep sense of a Māori notion of darkness – as Albert Wendt put it, "darkness itself is very alive."⁸⁹ Hotere's 'Māori-Catholic nexus' provides an open framework to consider the multiple spiritual influences that contribute to his work. This interpretive basis includes the "artistic whakapapa of modernism,"⁹⁰ the spiritual significance of the natural world within the world view of Te Aupōuri Māori, and the European Catholic community of Hotere's childhood that speaks to the recurrent Catholic symbolism within his images.

The shape of my analysis of Hotere's spiritual sensibility is divided as follows. Firstly, I consider the relationship between Catholicism and the notion of contemplation in Hotere's *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* series, with consideration of the motif of the Sacred Heart. Secondly, I consider Hotere's relationship to international trends of modernist abstraction. Thirdly, I consider Hotere's Māori heritage which encompasses a spiritual sensibility that diverges from these first two categories to include a strong sense of

⁸⁹ Albert Wendt believed Hotere "was restoring to the colour black, or to darkness, the Māori and Polynesian view of darkness as being the very fecund and fertile darkness out of which all life comes, because it is a live creature...the darkness itself is very alive." Albert Wendt in *Hotere*, directed by Merata Mita (New Zealand, 2001), DVD.

⁹⁰ O'Brien, "Tenebrae – Transfigured Night," 30.

interconnectedness with the land. Lastly, I undertake a synthetic reading that allows consideration of the ways Hotere's spiritual sensibility can be interpreted as a form of theopoetics.

The placement of Hotere somewhere on the spectrum of late modernism is not a driving point of my argument. Instead I move towards an elucidation of the notion of the sacred within a nexus of interpretation. O'Brien believes that Hotere's "identity doesn't tie him to any single set of cultural co-ordinates or to movement in one constant direction."⁹¹ Wedde's referral to Hotere's "reticence" as "a way of leaving space in which others can be heard,"⁹² resembles something of "marae protocol" for Kirsten Rennie, where "the 'liminal space' is respected in light of its potential for 'becoming', as are the voices of those who care to define the tenets of their own culture."⁹³ So reading along with Hotere opens several ways of conceiving his spiritual sensibility. I argue that Hotere was wholly engaged in what could be translated as a form of theopoetics that emerged from his lived experience as a painter. Hotere not only presented a mystical luminous darkness in his work, but his practice demonstrates a form of embodied participation. O'Brien clarifies the broader picture:

Throughout his career, Hotere has painted requiems, producing elegies for individuals, tribes, for humanity as a whole and for the environment. In fulfilling this function, the paintings partake of, rather than simply describe, a darkness common to all humanity.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Gregory O'Brien, *Hotere: Out the Black Window: Ralph Hotere's work with New Zealand poets* (City Gallery, Wellington, 1997), 76.

⁹² Wedde, "Introduction: Where is the art that does this?" in O'Brien, *Hotere: Out the Black Window*, 9.

⁹³ Kirsten Rennie, "Urban Māori Art: The Third Generation of Contemporary Māori Artists: Identity and Identification" (MA. Diss., University of Canterbury, 2001), 59. Marae: 3. (noun) courtyard - the open area in front of the wharehau [meeting house], where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often also used to include the complex of buildings around the marae. *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=marae> (Accessed 23 November 2018).

⁹⁴ O'Brien, *Hotere: Out the Black Window*, 117.

CHAPTER THREE

Hotere's Catholicism: a material mysticism of the heart

In this chapter I consider Hotere's Roman Catholic sensibility as it emerges through his *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* (c. 1991 -) series. I then explore his use of the Sacred Heart motif more generally and the situation of his work as an expression of material religion. Here the mystical tradition of theology, through St John of the Cross takes a decidedly literary manifestation in his work. The definition of an apophatic theology that affirms an embodied poetics of love dovetails with Hotere's "elemental...earthly and sensual," mysticism.¹

Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro: Hotere's Catholic sensibility

Hotere's *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* series provides a representative location to explore the rendering of his Catholic heritage and sensibility. Hotere produced a number of works entitled *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, initiated in 1991, which were predominantly black lacquered works on glass, with gold leaf, and gold dust, set within recycled window frames. In most cases gold leaf is applied to the underside of the glass then painted over with black lacquer – hence *the black of the gold*. The work is then viewed through the glass from the opposite side to the applied paint. The gold leaf appears as encased within the black. In many of these works, four square swatches of gold leaf are set within the four corners of the frame (see ref. 1, fig. 1). Sometimes the gold is arranged in the form of a cross, and other times the application is of a fluid nature, resembling flame or liquid. In one work, the gold is rendered in an expressionistic splattering where in parts the gold forms a layer from which clouds of dust emanate (ref. 12). The work is composed within an outline of another window, upon which dances drops of gold, like that of a rain drop covered window at night, reflecting droplets of warm light.

Sometimes Hotere includes additional crosses. In one of the works he includes the Chi Rho Christogram (XP). In at least two of the works, Hotere includes an iteration of the Sacred Heart, a motif he commonly employed throughout his oeuvre. The predominant

¹ O'Brien, "Tenebrae – Transfigured Night," 31, 34.

quality of the surfaces of the *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* works is characteristically reflective, creating an effect that intentionally places the viewer within the image.

The *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* series is considered a later iteration of Hotere's concerns with black, and as one of his series that most reflects his relationship with Catholicism.² The tiny smears of gold leaf are redolent of the candle light of a Catholic mass, or the gilded surfaces of much Catholic architecture. The connection of these works with Hotere's experience in Spain (his first visit to Spain in the 1960s and subsequent return visits) is also redolent in the title which translates as "the black over the gold."

It is a work whose leylines are cast back beyond the founding tenets of modernist abstraction into the physical phenomenology of light and dark and at [sic] parallel the living symbols of the catholic faith whose mythologies and eternal verities were as intimate to Hotere as the ancestral genealogy of his Te Aupouri iwi: the people of smoke and flame.³

This series has been considered a departure from Hotere's political concerns,⁴ yet the connection could be made within the turn of phrase 'black gold,' as read into the translation of the title of the work. Hotere's concerns with the political situation in the Middle East – evident in Hotere's and Cilla McQueen's *Song of Solomon* (1991, see ref. 13) works, for example – support this interpretation. Kate Powell believes that these works could be "...a nod to his activist past...with the interpretation of the series title to mean 'What about the Black Gold?' as Hotere famously opposed any mining and oil extraction that impacted the environment."⁵ However, 'What about the black gold,' is an incorrect translation of *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, which is properly translated as 'the

² Baker writes, "When it was suggested to Hotere that the *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* series were the most Catholic of his works he remarked he thought this a fair assessment." Ralph Hotere in conversation with Kriselle Baker, February 2007 cited in Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 60.

³ Hamish Coney, "46: Ralph Hotere: *Black Window*," in *Art + Object: Important Paintings & Contemporary Art* (Auckland: Art + Object, April 2011), 64.
<https://www.artandobject.co.nz/auctionresources/262/importantpaintingsandcontemporaryartapr11.pdf> (accessed 26 October 2018).

⁴ See Kristelle Baker and Vincent O'Sullivan, *Hotere*, (Ron Sang Publications, 2008), 265.

⁵ Kate Powell, "21: Ralph Hotere: *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*," in *Important Paintings & Contemporary Art: Catalogue 509* (Auckland: Webb's, April 2015), 55.
https://issuu.com/webbs_house/docs/important_paintings___contemporary___d2e994581528ca (26 October, 2018).

black over the gold.’ A political spin on the interpretation of the title of this work can only come through taking creative licence with the translation.

A reading of these works in reference to the thematic notion of grief is also salient. Baker reads the black of *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, alongside Motherwell and Hotere’s interest in Goya, and makes the connection between the theme of grief in Goya, Motherwell’s “concept of a painting as an elegy” and the correlative mode of Symbolist poetry, also employed by Motherwell.⁶ The crosses which appear in some of the *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* works add weight to an interpretation that defines the work as a form of elegy or memorial.⁷ Hotere’s *Requiem* series also supports this interpretation.

A poetics of domestic space is highlighted in Baker’s reading of *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*. Hotere’s use of recycled window frames positions the viewer as they might look out of a window into the night, or as they view their reflection in the glass of a darkened lamp lit room. These works reflect a sense of domestic intimacy, while drawing the viewer into a state of contemplation through the transfixing effect of fire. Baker draws the reader’s attention to the poet Lorca, locating in one of his poems, “La Saeta / The Arrow,” a description of Hotere’s *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*.

⁶ Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 10.

⁷ Baker relates this series to some of Hotere’s other series that are full of tiny crosses: “The small crosses that we see in the ANZAC lithographs were also a feature of the Middle East lithographs (1991) where they were blended with Arabic script and a five-pointed star. These works are associated with the *Song of Solomon* series which...were a protest against American participation in the 1991 Gulf War. The use of multiple small crosses therefore has come to represent conflict and death, which is how the crosses of the *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* works can be read. This reading underscores the black of these works, which is explicitly referred to in the Spanish title, bringing to mind the grief that we associate with the black of Goya.” Ibid., 61.

Noche

Cirio, candil,
farol y luciérnaga.

La constelación
de la saeta.

Ventanas de oro
tiemblan,

y en la aurora se mecen
cruces superpuestas.

Cirio, candil,
farol y luciérnaga.

Night

Candle, lamp,
lantern and firefly.

The constellation
of the dart.

Little windows of gold
trembling,

and cross upon cross
rocking in the dawn.

Candle, lamp,
lantern and firefly.⁸

Evocations of Spanish culture and the Catholicism of Hotere's childhood come to mind for Baker, in her reading of this work alongside Lorca's poem:

what we see beyond the gold flicker of candlelight is the black of a night window – if not Lorca's poem directly, a distant memory of an evening in Spain and of a room lit by candlelight... where the inky black of night and the flicker of candle and lamp light are familiar and comforting and laced with the spirituality of an individual belief.⁹

Gold leaf: spiritual light and the illumination of matter

The symbolism of gold as an analogue for spiritual light must also be mentioned in the context of the Catholic vision of Hotere's *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* series. Baker refers to an interior candle-lit space in reference to these works. In some of Hotere's works the gold is more prominent than that black: sometimes it is a liquid evanescent presence; sometimes squares of gold leaf are tacked on a formal alignment with the picture frame;

⁸ Jaime de Angulo translation in Federico García Lorca, *The Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca*, ed. Francisco García Lorca and Donald M. Allen (New York: New Directions, 1961), 18, in *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹ Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 62–63.

sometimes the square edges smudge into dust, or lines of light bleed into the black; sometimes the gold is typographical. In most cases, I believe the gold reads as a visual enticement, a reference to a divine revenant, an iconographical reference to revelation even, rather than a commentary on the commercialisation of art. The market value of Hotere's work aside, his work is generous to his viewers.

Without mining the histories of the symbolism of gold, one can assume a straightforward interpretation of Hotere's religious sensibility through his use of gold leaf. Thomas McEvelley refers to a more particular Christian medieval symbolism of gold as representing "supernatural wealth," or "divine intelligence" (the iconography of golden halos of saints or holy people), or as representing the heavenly realm in the particular use of gold as the background planes of icons.¹⁰ He also refers to gold as symbolic of "infinity...as an expression of a religiosity that exalts death as well as life, or conflates them into a *Liebestod* or love-death unity."¹¹ According to McEvelley there is an "eternal essence" or absolutism about the symbolism of gold.¹²

The iconography of gold can also be approached within the context of the history of modern art. In McEvelley's overview of the spiritual and artistic influences on the development of monochrome painting he mentions Whistler as a forerunner of the monochrome tendency which emerged with the notion of the sublime. Whistler's work, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875, ref. 14)¹³ is one such work that could be drawn into comparison with Hotere's *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*.¹⁴ With Whistler we also see the connection with the Romantic tendency that viewed the purpose of art as an embodiment of "the *mysterium tremendum* ('the mystery that makes you tremble')".¹⁵ An expression of apophatic aesthetics can be traced within the

¹⁰ Thomas McEvelley, *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt*, (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), 266. McEvelley also makes note of the diminishing use of gold along with the secularisation of art in the Renaissance. It was retained however by occult traditions, alchemy for example.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹² McEvelley, *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt*, 263.

¹³ This work sparked off the Whistler versus Ruskin trial.

¹⁴ Baker also draws a connection between Hotere and Whistler, with reference to the concept of night within the context of Romanticism. But she does not make too much of the comparison, believing Hotere was not overly interested in Whistler. Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 73-77.

¹⁵ McEvelley, "Seeking the Primal Through Paint: The Monochrome Icon," in Thomas McEvelley with commentary by G. Roger Denson, *Capacity: History, the World, and The Self in Contemporary Art and*

development of the abstract monochrome of modern art. Don E. Saliers refers to modern art as “‘secular’ reminders of aspects of the language and contemplative practices in mystical theologians.”¹⁶ For him “aesthetic experience always plays on the horizon of awareness of something more than the bodily senses can yield.”¹⁷

The spiritual associations within Yves Klein’s use of gold provide another point of comparison with Hotere’s *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* works, along with his elemental monochromes: the use of burnished metal and so on. Through the use of gold leaf, Klein expressed a discovery of the “illumination of matter.”¹⁸ Hotere was both elemental and mystical. This sensibility is aptly expressed in the words of the Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, illustrating a mystical illuminated matter at the heart of which resides the divine. He writes:

Crimson gleams of matter, gliding imperceptibly into the gold of spirit, ultimately to be transformed into the incandescence of a universe that is person... The diaphany of the divine at the heart of a glowing universe, as I have experienced it through contact with the earth – the divine radiating from the depths of blazing matter.¹⁹

The religious dimension

Baker reads *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* as proffering a spiritual aesthetic “that is equivalent to but not specifically that of organised religion.”²⁰ I take this statement to mean that the style of this work contains an intimation of the cultural products of Spanish Catholicism but should not be interpreted as a liturgical work. However, the

Criticism Essays (Amsterdam: OPA, 1996), 47. McEvilley refers to Rudolf Otto’s interpretation of the term here. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, trans. by John W. Harvey (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959).

¹⁶ Don E. Saliers, “Aesthetics,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A. Lamm (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013), 86.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁸ Yves Klein quoted in Vanessa Morisset, “Yves Klein: Body, Colour, Immaterial,” (5 October 2006 – 5 February 2007), Centre Pompidou, Public and Educational Action Unit, November 2006, <http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-klein-EN/ENS-klein-EN.htm#intro> (21 July 2017). See Pierre Restany and Klaus Ottmann, *Yves Klein: fire at the heart of the void* (Washington, D.C. Spring Publications, 2005), 18.

¹⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of Matter*, trans. by René Hague (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 16.

²⁰ Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 210.

Easter liturgical tradition of Tenebrae that O'Brien has alluded to for example, supports a liturgical analogy. The question of how to read these works as religious comes to the fore.

O'Brien refers to Hotere's work as exemplary of good religious art that enacts upon and disrupts religious/secular, subject/object and art/life dichotomies. Hotere's *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* series fits within the former visual articulation that, in O'Brien's turn of phrase, "[like] the Holy Week Tenebrae, takes us into a chamber of darkened, opaque reverberations,"²¹ and "draws us through that blackness towards a state of illumination..."²² O'Brien defines this state of illumination in reference to John of the Cross's metaphor of the 'dark night' that is spiritually understood in light of the coming day. St John of the Cross is also a particularly helpful figure through which to consider the modernist heritage of abstract painting that drew upon apophatic mysticisms. The 'lyrical ecstasy' of the poetry of St John of the Cross that O'Brien locates in Hotere's darkness, does not immediately translate as a form of joy, but could be read into Hotere's work through a consideration of the intensity of the poetic language that medieval mystics employed, and which characterises an apophatic aesthetics.

The Roman Catholic Tenebrae offers a religious aesthetic as an analogy for reading Hotere's work, which also incidentally contributes to a reading of these works as objects that serve a liturgical function. Considering these works as aids for meditation, a liturgical framework for Hotere's work emerges which includes a reference to the doctrinal or religious content of the Easter calendar. The gradual extinguishing of candles between liturgical readings is the principle feature of a Tenebrae service, leaving the participants in darkness. Sometimes harsh sounds are produced at the extinguishing of the final candle to represent the earthquake at the moment of Christ's death. The time of day (or geographical location) of the service emphasises the symbolic and psychological effect of darkness in slightly different ways: a pre-dawn service would see the gradual diminishing of light met by the coming light of day, while a service in the afternoon or after midnight, would witness a fuller immersion in

²¹ O'Brien, "Tenebrae – Transfigured Night," 37.

²² Ibid., 28.

darkness.²³ Reading Hotere's work in reference to the Tenebrae ritual, also encompasses an allusion to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Sacred Heart

A liturgical interpretive approach can be found in Hotere's works that contain the recurring motif of the Sacred Heart. The Sacred Heart motif is found in at least two of Hotere's *Lo Negro Sombre Lo Oro* works. One of these works (ref. 15) presents the Sacred Heart along similar lines to his *Lo Negro Sombre Lo Oro* works in general. Another work is a lithograph from 1992, (ref. 16) that includes the inscription, "The Black over the Gold," in English and in Spanish.²⁴

The presence of the Sacred Heart reinforces the connection of these works to traditions of medieval monastic mysticism. It may be read through the texts of St John of the Cross, and later devotional practices that originated in the mid-seventeenth century, with the French nun Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-90).

The Sacred Heart is a recurring motif within Hotere's oeuvre, in particular resonance with his love for the Aotearoa New Zealand Otago coastline of Aramoana: "As early as 1982 Hotere associated the Sacré Coeur or Sacred Heart (Christ's heart pierced by a cross), seen [for example]...in red on red [in *Rosemary*, 1984, ref. 17], with the plight of coastal Aramoana."²⁵ In the cases in which the Heart is employed, Hotere's environmental concerns are distilled through the representation of an intercessory plea for the plight of the land. Another protest series (in this case unsuccessful) in which the

²³ See Richard Viladesau, *The Pathos of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts – the Baroque Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 126-128.

²⁴ Hamish Coney locates a Black Window work that includes the inscription *Lo negro sobre el oro* and the motif of the Sacred Heart, he writes: "Black Window which is inscribed *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* from 1992 tellingly combines the signature elements of these two bodies of work. The colonial sash window frame, perhaps the most singular vernacular readymade in all New Zealand art history, is both the physical manifestation and the metaphor for the call to bear witness that defines the Black Window works. The four equidistant gold leaf squares, like so many at this time are smeared, altered yet intact compositional pillars around which the darkened void encroaches and transgresses." Coney, "46: Ralph Hotere: *Black Window*," 64.

²⁵ Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Author unknown, *Rosemary* (1984), acrylic on loose canvas, 2430 x 1820mm, Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

http://collection.dunedin.art.museum/search.do?view=detail&bool-0=AND&field-0=USER_SYM_38&value-0=Hotere%2C+Ralph&collection=0&sort=ACCESSION_NO&page=2&db=object

(15 July 2017).

Sacred Heart returns, are the works Hotere made regarding the Otago harbour board's manoeuvres to claim land that held particular cultural (a "Māori pā²⁶ and burial site") and personal significance (where Hotere's studio had stood) for the artist.²⁷ *Oputae*²⁸ (1989, ref. 18, fig. 4) is one example. These works predominantly resembled topographical contour images of the landscape, where the hill above Port Chalmers was dissected with a sharp line, including the word CUT, to reference the section of land that was removed by the harbour board.²⁹ In some of these works the Sacred Heart motif wept, blood or tears. The particular *Oputae* work cited includes the inscription "and daisies falling."

Hotere himself provides some insight into the origins of his use of the Sacred Heart motif. On the back of a 2002 work entitled, *St Marie de la Mer* (ref. 19) is an inscription which reads:

There is a legend along the Cote d'Azur about a Black Madonna who floated down the Rhone from Central Europe, probably Poland, and landed at Saint Maries de la Mer where a stone church was built in the 12th century. Chiselled into one of the cornerstone blocks, is a heart insignia which I've used in paintings since 1978, when I spent some time in Avignon and the Carmague, and where Van Gogh also painted his Saint Maries fishing boat painting. Ralph Hotere 2002.³⁰

²⁶ pā "2. (noun) fortified village, fort, stockade, screen, blockade, city (especially a fortified one)." *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=pā> (Accessed 20 September 2018).

²⁷ Elizabeth Rankin, *The Warwick & Kitty Brown Collection: mossgreen-webb's* (May 2017), 78-79. https://webbs.co.nz/catalogues/Warwick_KittyBrown_Collection/inc/html/81.html?page=80 (Accessed 20 September 2018).

²⁸ Otherwise known as Observation Point, in Port Chalmers, Otago.

²⁹ In 2005 a sculpture garden was established upon Observation Point that includes works by Hotere and other noted artists.

³⁰ Cited in Peter Shand "Ralph Hotere," in *Important Works of Art Fine Jewellery & Watches Decorative Arts & Modern Design* 310 (Auckland: Webb's Auction House, 17 March 2010), 60. https://issuu.com/webbs_house/docs/marchsale3dcat (Accessed 26 October 2018). According to legend, Saintes Maries De La Mer is the "alleged landing spot of an early Christian entourage. [the three Marys] The dark statue of St Sara the Egyptian, who, it is said, gave birth to the cult of the Black Virgins in the area, is also at this site and is also venerated by the gypsies." Karen Ralls, *Medieval Mysteries: A Guide to History, Lore, Places and Symbolism*, (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2014), 256.

In the circular *St Marie de la Mer* work, the silhouette of a Black Madonna floats on a watery reflective surface within an outline of the Sacred Heart. Peter Shand reflects upon this work, highlighting an “augmented spiritual dimension” he sees in Hotere’s work from the time he undertook the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Travel Grant in 1978.³¹ For Shand, this particular work has an elemental quality of light, which reads as “a metaphor for the presence of the other-worldly in earthly life.”³² Again, Hotere’s works are read as inseparable from the earth. As an oil on mirror support, the silver surface of this piece reflects a “literal” translation of “mystical illumination,” according to Shand, and which differs from the black reflective surfaces of works from the *Lo Negro Sombre Lo Oro* series, for example.³³ The Black Madonna and the history of Sacred Heart devotion in relation to the development of mystical theology that draws upon the allegory of the Song of Songs provides a liturgical framework for a religious aesthetic – one that draws upon the richness of symbolism, allegory and the histories of interpretation of the Song of Songs.

The Song of Songs: a literary mysticism

A literary reading of the Song of Songs alongside Hotere’s use of the Sacred Heart provides an interpretive lens through which to consider mystical tradition in association with Hotere. An exegetical examination of the Sacred Heart in St John of the Cross’s *Spiritual Canticle* following a reading by Luce López-Baralt, sheds light on a mystical interpretation of the reflective surfaces of Hotere’s work and the position of the viewer as the recipient within of the *meditative* quality of Hotere’s material. López-Baralt refers to St John of the Cross’s Sacred Heart as “an extremely complex organ of mystical reception.”³⁴ He writes:

This symbolic locus, the metaphorical center of the inner soul in mystical union, functions as a fluctuating mirror capable of reflecting God’s endless attributes in

³¹ Shand “Ralph Hotere,” 60.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Luce López-Baralt, “Saint John of the Cross and Ibn ‘Arabi: The Heart or *Qalb* as the Translucid and Ever-Changing Mirror of God,” Paper presented at the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society’s 17th annual symposium, Chisholme House, Scotland, UK, 3-6 August 2000, n.p. Cited at The Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society, <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/saintjohn.html> (10 June 2017).

perpetual transformation, without limiting itself to any of these manifestations in particular. This sublime receptacle of the Divinity's endless epiphanies constitutes the sacred symbolic space of the spiritual betrothal between God and the soul. It is, in turn, the central axis in which the created world comes into harmony with the transcendent God. This symbolic heart is thus capable of achieving in one supreme moment the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Earth and Heaven.³⁵

The development of a "mysticism of the heart" within Christian tradition is divergent in both iconography and theology.³⁶ López-Baralt notes, for example, a contrast of the "...visions of Christ's tortured heart, associated with feminine conventional piety...with the devotion to the Paschal Christ who illuminates the mystic's interior heart in orthodox Christianity."³⁷ The cult of the Sacred Heart, "venerated as a bleeding viscera," that came after St. Margaret-Maria Alacoque, here politicized and elevated with the establishment of a Feast day, moved in a direction of devotion that for López-Baralt, "[eclipsed] its real spiritual dimension."³⁸ López-Baralt places St John of the Cross at a remove from his own spiritual milieu and locates connections between mystical symbolism and Sufism. It is within this context that López-Baralt considers St John of the Cross's Heart as "an ever-changing, infinite mirror of God."³⁹ This symbolic motif of the Sacred Heart that López-Baralt goes on to define, supports a reading of Hotere's use of reflective surfaces.

St John of the Cross's *Spiritual Canticle*, as commentary on the Song of Songs, and a formula of direction for union with the divine, is also an important work within the canon of mystical theology, the Song of Songs being an originary text for the tradition. The watery support for Hotere's floating black Madonna in *St Marie de la Mer* could be obliquely interpreted as the well of living water within the Song of Songs. López-Baralt locates a fountain of water as the site of mystical union and as a "symbol of the inner

³⁵ López-Baralt, "The Heart or *Qalb*, n.p.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

heart” in the Soul’s journey to locate the Divine: “This metaphoric innermost soul works as a mirror ... endowed with double vision (two eyes) ...capable of reflecting the Majesty of God in its infinite self-disclosure.”⁴⁰

Oh, crystalline fountain!

If only in your silvery countenance

You would suddenly form

The eyes I long for

*Which in my innermost self I have portrayed!*⁴¹

At the site of the fountain, the Soul, according to López-Baralt, loses her identity. Her physical body is not reflected in the water, but she finds an indistinguishable “pair of eyes belonging to the maiden and to her Beloved at the same time...” as an “ontological *locus* – of both lovers simultaneously.”⁴² So the Sacred Heart is here a “crystalline ‘heart’ endowed with transcendental self-contemplation” where the Soul instead “[contemplates] herself in God.”⁴³ In the “mirror of her own identity” in which the divine is also reflected the Soul thus “participates” in the divine “Being.”⁴⁴ The metaphoric image – that of two mirrors facing each other and producing that distinctive infinite loop of reflection – is the Soul’s encounter with Divine love in an infinite “stream...of the Divine attributes in the soul.”⁴⁵ López-Baralt argues that the idiosyncrasy of this metaphor does not best fit a Christian frame of reference, (the historical context of St John of the Cross’s metaphor comes well before the cult of the Bleeding Heart), but it can be illuminated through an Islamic cultural rubric, that relays a point of connection between the “soul and the Cosmos.”⁴⁶ López-Baralt relates St

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “The Beloved observes Himself in His Bride, while she contemplates Him in herself because she *is*, or perfectly reflects, all the simultaneous transformations of the ineffable attributes of God which are manifested in her own substance.” Ibid.

⁴⁶ López-Baralt continues, “In Islamic mysticism, the symbolic heart lacks the corporeal quality it ended up acquiring in the Christian tradition, and is related instead to the spiritual stylisation of Oriental mysticism. The Egyptian, Hermetic and alchemic mystical traditions, Chinese Taoism, Indian Tantrism

John of the Cross's "subtle organ of mystical perception" to the "*qalb* or interior heart," of Sufism, a trilateral root word that enables the expression of a transformative paradigm.⁴⁷ The viewer's physical interaction with Hotere's work is primarily a dance with their own reflection which positions St John of the Cross's metaphor as a significant interpretive key. A key example of the reflective Sacred Heart in Hotere's collection is *Les Saintes Maries De La Mer* (1984, ref. 20, fig. 5). In this work the Sacred Heart takes up the whole frame on a reflective surface that is literally mirror like. Swirls of reflective surface encompass and transpose the background and the viewer within the work. This image also has an undulating three-dimensional quality to the surface; the heart swells with intention.

This interpretation places the redemption of the created world within the reflective fold of the metaphor as a *coincidentia oppositorum* site of connection of the Beloved's song to the land, and the heart of the Divine.⁴⁸ Hotere's use of the Sacred Heart here gains an added dimension. This reading of the Sacred Heart assists in delineating a form of mysticism that includes Hotere's environmental concerns. López-Baralt concludes:

The Spanish poet's rich symbol is multi-faceted, like a veritable diamond of light: it is a fluctuating mirror capable of reflecting the Divinity's epiphanies without limiting itself to any; it is an axis where the created world joyously converges with its Creator; a well capable of blending water with fire; a mystical organ endowed with two eyes; and, finally, a mystical *locus* composed of concentric orbits protected by successive ramparts and walls.⁴⁹

and even Tibetan Buddhism conceive the mystical organ of the inner heart as a dynamic function which serves as the point of convergence between the innermost soul and the Cosmos." Ibid.

⁴⁷ "The Arab word *qalb*, derived from the root *q-l-b*, besides its primary sense of "heart", assumes the simultaneous meanings of "center", "soul", "spirit", "mold" or "receptacle", "perpetual change", "return", "change", "transformation", "becoming", "transmutation", "inversion", "reversion", "being reversible", "well", "heart of palm", among other meanings..." Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Apophatic aesthetics and the dark night of the soul

Apophatic theological tradition as conceived through the literature of St John of the Cross also assists a reading of Hotere's 'black light.' While the phrase 'the dark night of the soul,' has a colloquial ring about it, it builds upon the notion of the Sacred Heart as the mystical interpretation of the reflective surfaces of Hotere's works, and presents a way in which to consider Hotere's aesthetic within the tradition of negative theology. A literary sensibility emerges to dovetail with Hotere's literary allegiances, through a closer reading of St John of the Cross.

St John of the Cross presents a way of understanding the mystical journey as it is embedded in the text. As David Jasper argues, rather than a "supernatural" flight beyond the text, or through it, St John of the Cross represents a way of "going into language and its demanding realism."⁵⁰ Ana Barro affirms the heterodox nature and style in the "poem-plus commentary" form of St John of the Cross's *Spiritual Canticle*.⁵¹ For her, this work is "an adventurous form of linguistic mysticism" that contains an open-ended approach to textuality that prefigures recent post-structuralist theory, and reflects Midrashic tradition.⁵² The activity of writing, is itself part of the configuration that engenders awareness of the transcendent. As Don Cupitt puts it, "St. John of the Cross did not first have a language transcending experience, and then subsequently try to put it into words. On the contrary, the very composition of the poem was itself the mystical experience."⁵³ Language was the vehicle that St John of the Cross employed to address his suffering and seek resolution. The 'dark night' as an orientation of vision in darkness, is an activity of the soul through writing.

A transposition of the mystical experience of the 'dark night' from writing to painting follows suit. Hotere's work exhibits a continued engagement with the theme of the 'dark night.' While Hotere's artistic intentions are not stated, his work can be translated

⁵⁰ David Jasper, *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture*, (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 59-60.

⁵¹ Ana Barro, "Language and Mysticism in the 'Spiritual Canticle' (1577) by St John of the Cross," in *Trajectories of Mysticism in Theory and Literature*, ed. P. Leonard (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 4.

⁵² Barro, "Language and Mysticism in the 'Spiritual Canticle' (1577) by St John of the Cross," 4.

⁵³ Don Cupitt, *Taking leave of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 74-75, cited in Jasper, *The Sacred Desert*, 61.

as a form of mystical experience through painting. St John of the Cross's *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *Dark Night* were "intended for those who 'feel lost' on the spiritual path..." according to Edward Howells, with the notion that there is a hiddenness of God in periods of darkness.⁵⁴ "Within the darkness, he finds that the soul has a hidden yet intense desire for God that can guide it to the light of mystical union."⁵⁵ Howells goes on to explain:

John's object is to chart the long progress of purgation that precedes union. Purgation and illumination – darkness and light – are combined on the spiritual journey. He applies the benefit of hindsight, from the perspective on union, to find the seeds of union within the process of purgation (*Ascent* 2.4:8 – 5:11). Indeed, when illumination is mystical, he says, it is felt by the unreformed soul as dark and empty, because God exceeds the capacity of the soul and "blinds" it, like looking at the sun, and because of the soul's impurity, which obscures the light (e.g., *Ascent* 2.8:6; *Night* 2.5). Correctly discerned, however, this "dark illumination" can be received as grace, so that, rather than running away from it or seeking to fill the emptiness with other things, including misplaced spiritual exercises, the soul can begin to rest in the divine inflow and to recognize it as light (*Night* 1.9-10; 2.8:4).⁵⁶

This darkness has a transformative impetus: through grace, the mind is able to inwardly perceive the presence of God. Howells explains, as "faith, hope and love" are eradicated, "intellect, memory and will," take position as enablers of discernment of the divine within the dark night.⁵⁷ Rather than placing light and dark in opposition, St John of the Cross affirmed a dialectical relationship between lightness and darkness.

Hotere's *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, contain redolent luminous spaces which the interpreter may lay hold of. Even in Hotere's darkest works there remain traces of light. Yet perhaps the full extent of the exercise that is asked of the soul in St John of the

⁵⁴ Edward Howells, "Spanish Mysticism and Religious Renewal: Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, 433.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Howells writes, "...such that God's deep being, which touches the soul in the soul's 'substance' and 'center,' ceases to be dark and becomes recognizable as light." *Ibid.*, 434.

Cross's 'dark night,' is not entirely realised for the viewer in Hotere's works. As a form of literary flourish, the notion of the 'dark night' provides an illustration for a spiritual context. St John of the Cross provides a way of conceiving an inherent mysticism within the practice of writing. This interpretation provides a way of reading the 'dark night' of Hotere's work as a form of practiced mysticism, bolstered by his literary sensibility. An interpretation of mystical tradition that affirms an embodied form of apophatic aesthetics defines Hotere's spiritual sensibility in this context.

The character of apophatic aesthetics shifted according to the ways different mystics delineated the relation between the physical and the spiritual. Saliers debunks the common assumption that the definition of transcendence involves a necessary flight from physicality. He identifies the presence of dichotomies within the literature of mystical theology – “between mind and body, ‘inner’ and ‘outer,’ the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘physical,’ intimacy with God and human sensuality, and between other-worldliness and this worldliness” – that reveal a Platonic and Neoplatonist tendency within the tradition, but should not be assumed as a general characterisation of mysticism.⁵⁸ He goes on to identify an aesthetic paradigm that involves “complex and subtle articulations of sensory and sensual dimensions of awareness and language” that exceed the linguistic and include embodied articulations: “The concept of ‘experience’ we meet in many primary texts is bodily ‘synaesthetic,’ often fusing more than one domain of sense with another.”⁵⁹ Saliers writes of an “intimate” connection between poetics and the apophatic mystery of God that he defines under the umbrella of a theological doxology, and where the “pulse and rhythm of speech itself is a key aesthetic factor.”⁶⁰ The apophatic aesthetics Saliers outlines, following Pseudo-Dionysius, “...involves a form of tensive [what Saliers defines as deconstructive] interpretation of the physical senses.”⁶¹ For Saliers, “in the very experiencing of God under the figures and tropes of human consciousness, the dissimilarity of God emerges.”⁶² Saliers identifies a relation between “*kataphatic* (in accordance with images) and *apophatic* (the negation of images)

⁵⁸ Saliers, “Aesthetics,” 80.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 84.

reflection on the language of spiritual senses.”⁶³ Affirmative and negative language become merged in tensive relation where “perceptible symbols available to the senses [are combined] with the inadequacy of all symbols and analogies for God.”⁶⁴ This position, as a definition of love, both exceeds physicality and yet is embedded within “embodied languages [that] form and express the ‘affective intentionality’ of human desire for God.”⁶⁵ Even though the “unutterability of God” is foregrounded, Saliers identifies the fact that “the accent is still on desire and love.”⁶⁶

Conclusions

In review of Hotere’s use of Catholic symbolism and aesthetics in his *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* series and other works, some conclusions can be drawn. First, questions in relation to Catholicism are not confined to Hotere’s religious upbringing. What do these works offer the viewer? It has already been established that these works are not religious in the direct sense; but they can support a religious practice. Liturgical symbols are placed in the tradition of modernist abstraction. But reading these works as a form of material religion dismantles the notion of a disembodied contemplative spirituality redolent within readings of abstract monochrome painting.

What emerges here are two kinds of approach to the sacred within Hotere’s *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* works. The first follows the apophatic tradition of which St John of the Cross provides an interpretive entry point. On another level, Hotere’s use of liturgical symbolism presents an alternative interpretive approach: one that can also be read within the tradition of mystical theology but is categorised more succinctly within forms of devotional religious practice. The devotional and religious motifs transpose the tradition of mystical theology, modernised through the abstract monochrome, within the bounds of a material religion. These symbols are also transposed within the context of the art world. The *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* series has an “elemental” and “earthy and sensual” mystical quality, as O’Brien puts it, reiterating an embodied spiritual

⁶³ Ibid., 85.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

sensibility.⁶⁷ I also agree with O'Brien's affirmation of Hotere's work as the "fruition" of a sensual earthly spiritual paradigm, which is further grounded by Hotere's attentiveness to the everyday.⁶⁸ The motif of the sacred heart rings of a Catholic sensibility, but in Hotere's terms, it is wedded to the land.

In this chapter I have considered the *Lo Negro Sabre Lo Oro* series in the light of St John of the Cross and have argued that a literary grounding and materiality defines the aesthetic sensibility of mystic writers in poetry that attests to an embodied encounter with the divine. Apophatic aesthetics emerges here as a primary category for reading the spiritual sensibility of Hotere's work. But the tradition of apophaticism as it emerged through modernism, took alternative forms. In the following chapter I consider apophatic spiritual tradition in modern art through three interlocutors, Yves Klein, Ad Reinhardt and Antoni Tàpies. These figures represent three different iterations of art world apophaticism, and within Hotere literature, have been placed in comparison with one or more of his sensibilities. Arguably, Reinhardt took the literary out of mediaeval mysticism. An attentive reader would see that Hotere embraces the literary, while retaining a similar universalising goal of modern abstract art. The genealogy of negative theology as it has emerged within the theological turn in recent schools of philosophical thought remains in the background. But the connection between apophatic theology and notions of embodiment, materiality and relationality that emerge here can be considered as a form of theopoetics that I read within Hotere in the final chapter of this study.

⁶⁷ O'Brien, "Tenebrae – Transfigured Night," 31. Mary Kisler writes of *Black Phoenix* "[as having] the ability to confront you with a sense of something otherworldly – some might say divine. Ralph saw aspects of this when he spent time in Spain – drawn to the region's visceral, sometimes anarchic nature, where histories of blood, struggle, faith, life and death simmer beneath the surface of everyday life. To me, seen from a distance, that ship's prow becomes a darkened silhouette – like a great, caped figure, arms outstretched – either warding you off or waiting to embrace you." Mary Kisler, "Remembering Ralph Hotere," *The Listener*, 2nd March, 2013 <http://www.listener.co.nz/culture/arts/remembering-ralph-hotere/> (30 June 2016).

⁶⁸ O'Brien, "Tenebrae – Transfigured Night," 34.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hotere's modernism: international influences

The contextualisation of Hotere's work within international modernist abstraction provides another avenue for interpreting his spiritual sensibility. Ad Reinhardt has often been associated with Hotere's interests. Mane-Wheoki also identifies Antoni Tàpies and Yves Klein as potential interlocutors within a decidedly European modernism.¹ Focusing mainly on the work of Reinhardt, in this chapter, I draw on the spiritual conceptions of these three artists.

Tàpies helps ground a reading of the spiritual in art within the everyday. Both Tàpies and Hotere employed the use of everyday found materials, and both employed the use of the "crux decussata (the X-shaped cross)" in their work.² Tàpies's embeddedness within the culture of Spanish Catholicism is another point of comparison. The train of a European Catholicism in Tàpies work also assists in understanding Hotere's affiliation with this tradition.

Klein is a forerunner of the modernist monochrome. In contrast to Hotere, Klein was interested in colour as the embodiment of immateriality. Mane-Wheoki makes a comparison between Hotere's *Song Cycle* (1976, ref. 21) and Klein's *Cosmogenies* (1960, ref. 22) regarding their respective actions of weathering canvases. Like Klein, Hotere also makes use of a blowtorch in the production of some of his works.³ Klein's conceptual framework for the notion of immateriality is particular to his interests in Eastern and Western philosophy and practice, yet it is differentiated from the similar interests of Reinhardt and Tàpies.

¹ A host of artists can be placed in relation to Hotere's contribution. Mane-Wheoki lists a number of them: "Affinities with Carl Andre, Alberto Burri (and Arte Povera, generally), Jim Dine, Jean Dubuffet, Jasper Johns (though Hotere's Black Union Jack works of 1981 seem like a mordant reversal of Johns' 'Stars and Stripes' paintings of 1954-55) and Donald Judd's metal boxes and shelves, Malevich, Robert Mangold, Matisse, Reinhardt, the suave viscosity of Pierre Soulages, and the 'white writing' of Tobey may be discerned in Hotere's art." Mane-Wheoki, "The Black Light Paradox," 91.

² Ibid.

³ Mane-Wheoki makes a further comparison: "Klein's emptying out of the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris in 1958 foreshadows by twenty-one years Billy Apple's performance work *The Given as an Art-Political Statement (Censure)*, in which Hotere participated at the Bosshard Galleries in Dunedin." Ibid.

Hotere is at a significant remove from each of these artists, if one considers the spiritual world view of his Māori heritage. In the broader situation however, these artists share a vision of the way abstract art can be an object of disinterested contemplation. Each artist provides individual schematics of a spiritual sensibility that, when read alongside Hotere's indebtedness to modern abstraction, help to clarify his contribution. In a sense this interpretive approach follows the tradition of negative theology – we can only see where Hotere is not. As Wedde puts it, Hotere is *elsewhere*.

Hotere and Reinhardt

Buried within each painting and yet modulating across its surface is a conventional geometric pattern that must be sought after if it is to be properly seen, for each one is stated by means of an almost imperceptible change of colour or by a slight variation in texture.⁴

This statement on Hotere's work by art historian Gordon Brown, recalls the meditative quality that defines Reinhardt's work. It is not hard to discern the interpretative similarities here. Hotere's 'black paintings' have been compared with the international benchmark of Reinhardt's formalist concerns, yet neither the content nor the stylistic sensibility of his work is a seamless reflection of Reinhardt's concerns.

Formal comparisons

Hotere's *Black Paintings* (1968) series is a clear point of departure for a reading of his work alongside Reinhardt (see ref. 23-24). Art historian and critic Frances Pound's examination of the influence of Reinhardt in Hotere's work assists in contextualising Hotere's art. Hotere himself directly referenced Reinhardt on a few occasions, one of which were the tongue-in-cheek inscriptions he made on a selection of plates in a MOMA *Ad Reinhardt* (1991) catalogue while he was at a golf tournament in 1997 (ref. 25). Hotere's inscriptions co-title Reinhardt's works with the names of each of the eighteen holes at the Augusta Golf club, also adding specific numbers of yards with the assigned pars. Three roman numerals, "AMEN CORNER" and "THIS IS TIGER

⁴ Gordon H. Brown, "The Auckland Scene," *Ascent I* in Mark Young "Love plus Zero / no Limit," 15.

COUNTRY,”⁵ are inscribed across the spread of one of the pages (where Hotere also dates the work, gifting it to one of his dealers, Sue Crockford). Here, Pound identifies a “friendly relation” between Hotere and Reinhardt, adding, “If Hotere reads Reinhardt while looking at Tiger Woods, we can read Reinhardt while looking at *Hotere*.”⁶

Pound draws on Reinhardt as an interpretive key to Hotere’s black paintings, with reference to Hotere’s 1968 ‘spectrum-coloured’ works. Hotere made three groups of seven works in series at this time. Seven black lacquered surfaces are quartered by thin lines (executed with a ruling pen) of a cross in each colour of the spectrum of light. The surfaces of these works are a pristine black, readily recalling Reinhardt’s immaculate black surfaces.

Another association that Hotere made with Reinhardt, was in the use of Reinhardt’s “Art-as-Art Dogma,” in the exhibition catalogue *Ralph Hotere: Zero* in 1967, and in 1968, when he included a Reinhardt wall-text in an exhibition. Pound does not believe that Hotere was “*influenced* by Reinhardt’s pungent brevities,” but suggests the use of Reinhardt’s texts are “a convenient way in,” or serve as “as protocols” for reading aspects of Hotere’s work.⁷ Pound constructs a comparative framework for a close reading of Hotere’s work alongside the parameters of Reinhardt’s rules for abstract art, and examines the similarities and differences between the two artists. The following paragraph presents a summary of Reinhardt’s rules, referencing most of the rules Pound addresses in conversation with Hotere:

A square (*neutral, shapeless*) canvas, five feet wide, five feet high, as high as a man, as wide as a man’s outstretched arms (*not large, not small, sizeless*), trisected (*no composition*), one horizontal form negating one vertical form (*formless, no top, no bottom, directionless*), three (*more or less*) dark (*lightless*) no-contrasting (*colorless*) colors, brushwork brushed out to remove brushwork, a matte, flat, free-hand painted surface (*glossless, textureless, non-linear, no*

⁵ THIS IS TIGER COUNTRY refers to one of Hotere’s previous works and to Tiger Woods. *This is Tiger country*, lacquer and stainless steel, exhibited at the Bosshard Gallery, Dunedin, 1983.

⁶ Francis Pound, “Tiger Country: Hotere, Reinhardt and the US Masters,” in *Ralph Hotere: Black Light. Major Works Including Collaborations with Bill Culbert*, 15.

⁷ Ibid.

hard edge, no soft edge) which does not reflect surroundings – a pure abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless, disinterested painting – an object that is self-conscious (*no unconsciousness*) ideal, transcendent, aware of no thing but art (*absolutely no anti-art*).⁸

Pound also considers the alternative configurations between materiality and immateriality in Reinhardt and Hotere's work. According to Pound, Reinhardt's couplets: "The substance of art is not substance. / The matter of art is not matter," and "A color in art is not a color. / Colorlessness in art is not colorlessness," indicate the material quality of art as the site of "transcendent immateriality."⁹ When it comes to the presence of colour however, they remain material: "Blue in art is blue."¹⁰ Hotere's *Black Paintings* (1968) contain thin lines of colour —"the invisible colours of light and the visible colours of the rainbow"—that according to Pound retain their materiality.¹¹ In contrast with Reinhardt, a materiality is also visibly present in the fine edges of the lines themselves, as they float above the surfaces of glossy black. For Pound, this materiality is also the "site of a transcendent immateriality" in a referential sense, as "colour, in its particularity, has an emotional resonance for us – [it contains] something beyond its material self."¹² The following colours in Reinhardt's phrases – "Dark gray in art is not dark gray. / Matte black in art is not matte black" – were declared to be the only colours that could "attain immateriality."¹³ Reinhardt's greys are not present in Hotere's 1968 *Black Paintings*, yet they do appear in later works.¹⁴ Citing alternative uses of colour as references for either a transcendent immateriality or materiality, has a contradictory conceptual undertone, yet it does refer to the formal and material quality of paintwork. Like Reinhardt, the presence of brushwork is absent in Hotere's *Black*

⁸ Reinhardt, "Autocritique de Reinhardt," *Iris-Time* (Paris, 1963), 1, in Reinhardt, *Art as Art*, 82-83.

⁹ Pound, "Tiger Country: Hotere, Reinhardt and the US Masters," 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴ Pound sites Hotere's *Malady* series (1970 – 71) as an example of his use of these off black colourless colours. *Ibid.*, 18. According to Pound, Hotere "responds first to Reinhardt's monochrome colour (1967), then to his colourlessness (1968), then to his twin blacks (1970), and everywhere to the power of his negations." *Ibid.*, 18.

Paintings as they both sought to avoid the materiality of paint through endorsing a technique that brushed out the brush.¹⁵

An important differentiation between these two artists, hinges on the conceptual and perceptual difference between a matt and gloss surface. Reinhardt preferred a matt finish to his paintings while Hotere's *Black Paintings* (1968) have a gloss finish. Following Reinhardt's rules, Hotere's works read as the antithesis of immateriality. Gloss was something Reinhardt ruled out as "Everything else is on the move. Art should be still."¹⁶ The world rushes in upon a reflected gloss finish. Outlining Reinhardt's admonition, Pound writes:

Matt black disappears, in a sense, and so denies its materiality. Gloss, though seeming even more of a disappearing substance than matt, in its reflectiveness refuses disappearance, and keeps drawing attention back to its material self.¹⁷

The self-referential materiality of a gloss finish both draws in and eludes the viewer's gaze. The gloss finish literally reflects the presence of the viewer, so in a sense the viewer becomes part of the interpretation of the work.¹⁸ Reinhardt's analogy of immateriality still functions, yet in a different mode. The reflective swirls that Hotere rendered through the use of a metal grinding machine are a good example. The surfaces of the works shift and change with the viewer. Young questions "...how can we catch hold of something that is forever moving?"¹⁹ He continues, "The zen master has set the koan," and he suggests that the "answer lies in our hearts—that we let that something catch hold of us."²⁰ Pound also observes that the surfaces of these works contain a

¹⁵ Reinhardt was emphatic: "1) No texture. Texture...is a vulgar quality... 2) No brushwork. Handwriting...[is] poor taste... 'One should never let the influence of evil demons gain control of the brush.'" Reinhardt, "Twelve Rules for a New Academy," in *Art News* (May 1957) in *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶ Reinhardt, "Twelve Rules for a New Academy," in *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷ Pound, "Tiger Country: Hotere, Reinhardt and the US Masters," 22.

¹⁸ Hotere's words in the *Zero* catalogue: "most people want an unmistakable meaning which is accessible to all in a work of art... It is the spectator who provokes the change and the meaning in these works." In *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁹ Young, "Love plus Zero/no Limit", 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

“twisting sheen” that creates the effect of shifting spatial depths, and, “they turn, shift, and vanish into dark, as if they had never been, as the spectator shifts and turns.”²¹

And if the illusion of depth these swirls create should offend such a high modernist propriety as Reinhardt’s, this illusion might defend itself by saying ‘O I am not painted: I have not broken with modernist rule.’ Strangely, if paint is and should be immaterial according to Reinhardt’s dogma, these forms should be awarded the Reinhardtian victor’s palm. Nothing in paint could be more immaterial than these vanishing swirls that find their being only in the state of a perpetual disappearance into dark.²²

Another similarity between Reinhardt and Hotere, is their respective use of geometric motifs in their black paintings. Hotere’s recurring use of the cross and the circle, work in a similar mode to Reinhardt’s choice of emblems: H, + and I, which are embedded in Reinhardt’s blacks. Hotere’s colour spectrum of crosses sit upon the surface of his works, yet, according to Pound, in the same manner as Reinhardt, there is a distinctive “thinness and fragility, [where] a line loses itself, or threatens to lose itself, in dark.”²³

A comparison between the respective modes of practice, style, and decision making between Hotere and Reinhardt, highlights the variety of Hotere’s formal expressions of immateriality in his use of materials, which both align with and disrupt Reinhardt’s rules. As Pound points out, certain ‘protocols’ for interpretation can be derived from reading Reinhardt alongside Hotere. Reinhardt’s reference to religious texts alongside his work, as a “conceptual framework,”²⁴ assist in the task of approaching a reading of art in relation to theological tradition. As Baker highlights, the ‘spiritual dimension’ that unites Reinhardt’s and Hotere’s black paintings, emphasises the function of their paintings as ‘objects of disinterested contemplation.’ The spiritual implications of the ‘transcendental immateriality’ of painting, might be further understood in discussion with Reinhardt’s religious sensibility. Part of this transcendental paradigm is also of course attached to the viewer’s phenomenological encounter with their work.

²¹ Pound, “Tiger Country: Hotere, Reinhardt and the US Masters,” 25.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 21.

²⁴ Michael Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 90.

Phenomenological comparisons

I had the opportunity to view Reinhardt's work in an exhibition "Māori minimalism and international influence / Te toi tahanga Māori me te whakaawenga mai i tawhiti," (31 Aug 2016 - 26 Feb 2017) that was staged to bring Hotere and Reinhardt together for the first time. On show was Reinhardt's *Portfolio: 10 Screenprints* (1966), a monographic portfolio in reference to his black paintings encapsulating both his philosophical concerns and his formal concerns of the 1950s when he employed brighter hues of colour.²⁵

Standing in front of *Portfolio: 10 Screenprints*, I purposely spent more time with the darker prints in this series. I struggled with the lighting that, in combination with reflective glass, I thought provided too much of a barrier between the viewer and the surface of the work. Standing at approximately a metre distance from the picture frame, I read the surface of the work as a matte black plane, yet upon moving closer, geometric shapes emerged from the darkness, as if the work was revealing itself to me on its own terms. Shapes materialised in the black at the same time as I felt my eyes straining to lay hold of the image. There was a dynamic tension in the way the geometry shifted as my vision worked to locate the delineation of dark hues – realising that none of the works are pure black, but very deep shades of red, blue, or grey. The theory that these works shift the viewer's perspective and slow the viewer down, is certainly accurate. An awareness of the ocular mechanism of my visual encounter became a focal point of this experience. I stood waiting for my vision to settle; to locate a point of reference. But my eyes were physically incapable of focusing on the image. I was physiologically uncertain of what I was looking at.

²⁵ Reinhardt engaged with printmaking only over the last four years of his life. He distanced himself from the importance of authorship, entrusting the printing house Ives-Sillman to execute his designs. Sam Wagstaff encouraged Reinhardt to produce this series. Jennifer Field believes the "...sequence implies a visual account of the evolution of the black square paintings.... The idea for the monographic portfolio was enthusiastically supported both by ARTnews editor Thomas B. Hess and by artist Robert Rauschenberg, who in the early 1950s had created his own series of black paintings. Hess envisioned it as a kind of "retrospective" project, while Rauschenberg saw it as the opportunity to engage with issues of replication..." Jennifer Field, "Ad Reinhardt's Prints," <http://brooklynrail.org/2014/01/ads-thoughts-and-practices/ad-reinhardts-prints> (25 May 2017).

Some time after this experience, I located the following description of the process of viewing Reinhardt's work which validated my encounter:

and they work like this you're in a fully lit room with white or off-white walls to which your eyes are accommodated by fairly narrow pupils but when you try to see into one of the dark paintings your pupils start to dilate but are afflicted by the glare of reflected light spilling into your field of vision from the white walls which stimulates your pupils to contract so you find yourself struggling to keep looking into the pool of darkness wilfully struggling to keep your pupils dilated against any stimulus from the gallery light after a while this produces a kind of intense strain and you become slightly feverish from the strain and the feverishness of your feeling resulting from the eyestrain produces a weird exaltation that becomes an analog for a kind of transcendence that is a fitful character of reinhardt's painting but all of his dark paintings do the same thing this happens again and again and again with an insistency that reveals it as a metaphor for the transcendence of the art experience this is effective and powerful [...] ²⁶

The physical reaction I had to Reinhardt's prints was driven by my attention to the process of looking itself, which in turn asked more of my attention as my gaze continued to oscillate in and out of visual comprehension. I became physically aware of my eyes in relation to the focus of my mental attention to the works. I concluded that these works do indeed *demand* an aesthetic form of concentrated contemplation. Attentive engagement with Reinhardt's work is encouraged by the work itself. Like the practice of meditation, conscious attention to the work has similar rewards. As Stanton Marlan puts it, "looking into blackness requires a period of adjustment."²⁷ He writes that Reinhardt's black paintings, "[create] perceptual demands radically different from those of Western painting because his images require both the time to see and an act of

²⁶ David Antin, "the existential allegory of the rothko chapel" (San Diego, 2003), 123-133, in *Seeing Rothko*, ed. Glenn Phillips and Thomas Crow (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2005), 129. The formatting of this quote is transcribed according to the original source.

²⁷ Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and Art of Darkness* (College Station TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 27.

focusing so demanding that it changes the state of the viewer's consciousness."²⁸

Barbara Rose, who along these lines writes, that the perception involved is "not merely a different order of perception but [induces] a qualitatively different state of consciousness from normal consciousness..."²⁹ Alexandra Munroe defines this occurrence of consciousness in relation to Reinhardt's work as follows:

...his art is a perceptual experience with the specific power—indeed the ethical mandate—to purify consciousness through the act of concentrated contemplation. Reinhardt shifted the conception of seeing from an optical event to a phenomenological process and made durational time (of looking at the painting) a medium of ontological awareness. The substance of that awareness is the coincident dematerialization of the painting and the self beholding it. In this suspended state of mind, the boundaries of self are dissolved in a timeless sense of unity with the object of contemplation.³⁰

I can affirm Munroe's statement, having been made aware of this form of concentrated contemplation in a formal sense. The ontological awareness Munroe refers to is not only limited to a physical encounter with the work, but encompasses the whole self. The analogy for divine transcendence is located here, where aesthetic contemplation aids contemplation of the divine. I did not come close to experiencing a divine encounter through these works, but was made to contend with a form of contemplation that was physically and phenomenologically all-encompassing. My vision turned inward. I was made aware of myself as the viewer.

Reading Hotere alongside Reinhardt in the same space highlighted both the formal and phenomenological similarities and differences between their work. My experience confirmed Pound's findings outlined above. If Western mystical experience is defined through poetry and phenomenology, Hotere and Reinhardt maintain either end of the

²⁸ Ibid., 89.

²⁹ Rose, in *Ad Reinhardt*, 19 in Lippard, *Ad Reinhardt*, 174.

³⁰ Alexandra Munroe, "Art of Perceptual Experience: Pure Abstraction and Ecstatic Minimalism" in *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989*, ed. Alexandra Munroe (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2009), 287–299 cited at ALEXANDRA MUNROE BLOG: Lectures, Articles, Videos and Educational Resources, <http://www.alexandramunroe.com/art-of-perceptual-experience-pure-abstraction-and-ecstatic-minimalism/> (21 July 2017).

modernist translation of these terms. Hotere's work is decidedly more lyrical, drawing on meditative repetition of language within his work. Reinhardt, on the other hand, removes language as the vehicle of mystical experience.

Religious comparisons

If an analogy with mystical theology may be found within the notion of aesthetic contemplation, it must be differentiated from the literary sensibility of the tradition. The alteration of consciousness that occurs through the contemplative experience with Reinhardt's work, as Lippard explains, "must be registered on a non-literary, even non-verbal level."³¹

For the most part [Reinhardt] succeeded in wrenching what we call, for lack of a better term, the religious or mystical elements out of their standard literary context and making them state something separate about his art, about the goal of a single, imageless, colorless, lineless, timeless surface.³²

But Reinhardt's writings sit in tension with his works. Reinhardt's writings are rife with citations from mystical theological texts. He weaves these texts into the content of his art-for-art dogmas. In this sense his works are literary, yet according to Lippard, they are also "matter-of-fact descriptions of objects."³³ Critics have debated Reinhardt's position, as maintaining a particular reference to the "mystical" art historical tradition (Kandinsky, Newman, Rothko and so on) or as a pioneer of "Minimalism's literalist agenda."³⁴ Reinhardt's "negative theology" shifts between, a "literal anti-theism," or a reference to the great "void."³⁵ Yve-Alain Bois writes that Reinhardt "insisted, constantly...that his art had nothing to do with religion..."³⁶ Yet Reinhardt's own words present a very different picture, as he appears to define his work in sacred terms:

³¹ Lippard, *Ad Reinhardt*, 174.

³² Ibid.

³³ Reinhardt, unpublished notes, Archives of American Art, in Ibid.

³⁴ Munroe, "Art of Perceptual Experience," n.p.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Yve-Alain Bois writes that Reinhardt "found preposterous the idiotic interpretation of his tripartition...as alluding to Christianity." Yve-Alain Bois, "The Limit of Almost," in *Ad Reinhardt*, exh. cat. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1991), 28-29. Reinhardt continues: "A great many people are trying to make art a religion or have it replace traditional religion in which a god or the central

Holy ground, sacred space, fixed point, threshold, limit, entrance, ‘gate,’ sign, ritual, pure region; holy of holies, breakthrough from plane to plane...no change, no exhaustion, recoverable, repeatable, starting over at the beginning, eternal return, repetition, transmundane...Open self to the general & universal.³⁷

Bois’s interpretation of the “negative theology” in Reinhardt’s work is presented as a concept of proximity: “negative language, and art, are naturally condemned to look religious – almost. It almost looks religious because, as [with] negative theology, it is concerned only with the “not that, but almost.”³⁸ Bois adds, “The analogy is thus inevitable, but it is also a confusion.”³⁹ By way of explaining this confused logic, Bois then includes Derrida’s comments on negative propositions to shed light on the reception of Reinhardt’s phrases, and approach an understanding of the logic of negative theology in this context:

As soon as a proposition takes a negative form, it is enough to push the negativity thus announced to its limit, for the proposition to resemble, at least, a theological [apophatic.] Each time I say: X is neither this nor that ... I would commence to speak of God, under this name or under another.⁴⁰

Derrida states: “No, what I write is not negative theology.”⁴¹ But the relationship between negative theology and deconstruction can be expressed in similarly vague terms as Bois’s ‘not that, but almost’ and Reinhardt’s claim that his art had nothing to do with religion. Mary-Jane Rubenstein writes, “while deconstruction has everything to

essence can’t be pinned down and named. But pure abstract art is very limited as to what can be read into it. Abstract Expressionist art, on the other hand, is very open, in that people can read their own wishes and fantasies and subjectivities into it. Pure abstract art doesn’t permit that.” Reinhardt, “The Moral Content of Abstract Art”, *The Journal of Art* June/July/August (1991): 27, in Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 87.

³⁷ Reinhardt, “Mandala,” unpublished, undated notes, cited in Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art*, 189.

³⁸ Bois, “The Limit of Almost,” 29. Bois positions Reinhardt as someone who was *not* Zen, nor mystic, not agnostic, and so on. Reinhardt, according to Bois, was “not anything. But almost.” Reinhardt denied categories yet adhered to texts. His library is often cited as reflecting his concerns: full of books on philosophy and eastern and western mysticism.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Comment ne pas parler,” in *Psyché: Invention de l’autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 538 in Ibid. There is an error in the reproduction of the original text in this catalogue: apophantic should instead read apophatic.

⁴¹ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” trans. by Ken Frieden in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 77, in Mary-Jane Rubenstein, “Dionysius, Derrida, and the Critique of ‘Ontotheology,’” in *Modern Theology*, vol. 24 no. 4 (October 2008): 727.

do with negative theology, it also ‘has nothing to do with negative theology.’”⁴² She continues: “In other words, ‘it is and it is not.’”⁴³ This “almost” that Bois refers to, also characterises the physical act of viewing Reinhardt’s works – the viewer is not able to see exactly what they are looking at – as form becomes present and is then removed or negated in the very act of looking. An analogy with negative theology is tangible. In contrast with Hotere however, the dialectic between the kataphatic and the apophatic elements of this analogous iteration of negative theology is discounted for a singularly apophatic expression. Any sense of material embodiment is removed.

Reinhardt’s work could be considered a reorientation of perception that draws analogously from strands of tradition in Eastern and Western practices of religious contemplation. Through Reinhardt we find a connection with Christian mysticism alongside an interest in the language of Zen Buddhism and Hinduism, the aesthetics of Islamic architecture, and Chinese landscape painting.⁴⁴ Artist David Patten’s close reading of Reinhardt’s text *ONENESS*,⁴⁵ identifies a selection of allusions to various texts within Neo-Platonism, Roman Catholicism, theosophical tradition and Vaishnavism Hinduism.⁴⁶

⁴² Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 108, in Rubenstein, “Dionysius, Derrida, and the Critique of ‘Ontotheology,’” 727.

⁴³ Derrida, “The Original Discussion of Différance,” in *Derrida and Différance*, ed. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1985), 84, in Rubenstein, “Dionysius, Derrida, and the Critique of ‘‘Ontotheology,’” 726.

⁴⁴ On Chinese ink paintings Reinhardt writes: “They are organized and organic, atmospheric and airless, immanent and transcendent ...complete, selfcontained, absolute, rational, perfect, serene, silent, monumental, and universal.” Reinhardt, “Cycles through the Chinese Landscape,” *Art News* (December 1954), 25, in Munroe, “Art of Perceptual Experience,” n.p. Munroe writes: “Reinhardt’s painting work books are full of references to Buddhists texts, Hindu texts and Asian aesthetics and Tao Te Ching.” Ibid., n.p. Munroe also makes the connection between Reinhardt’s commencement with black painting with a trip Reinhardt took to Syria, Jordan, and Turkey in 1961, and the Islamic aesthetics he encountered there. In a letter to Thomas Merton, Reinhardt wrote “that he had become a ‘white Muslim,’ able to ‘find [himself] among anti-imagists, anti-idolatrists, pro-iconoclasts, and nonobjectivists.” “Ad Reinhardt to Thomas Merton” (1962), quoted in Joseph Mashek ed., “Five Unpublished Letters from Ad Reinhardt to Thomas Merton and Two in Return,” *Artforum* 17 (December 1978): 25, quoted in Munroe, “Art of Perceptual Experience,” n.p.

⁴⁵ Reinhardt, “ONENESS,” in Reinhardt *Art-as-Art*, 105-107.

⁴⁶ In the middle section of Reinhardt’s text, David Patten identifies the inclusion of “Plotinus’ ‘The Good or The One’ and the Bhagavad Gita (‘The Path of Knowledge’ and ‘The Path of Action’) ... Gregory of Nyssa (‘Life of Moses’, ‘Homilies on the Song of Songs’ and ‘Homilies on Ecclesiastes’), Nicholas de Cusa, Blessed Jan Van Ruysbroeck, ‘The Cloud of Unknowing,’ [and] The Pseudo-Dionysius’ ‘De Mystica Theologia.’” The last section of the text includes, “Albert Camus’ ‘The Rebel’ and Jean-Paul Sartre’s ‘Nausea’, Samuel Beckett’s ‘Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit’ (1965), Richard

Evidence suggests Reinhardt was seriously engaged with Western and Eastern forms of mysticism, yet, according to Michael Corris, these concerns primarily functioned as a conceptual framework for his aesthetic, or “in terms of a matrix of social and ideological concerns.”⁴⁷ Reinhardt’s friendship with Thomas Merton was influential in the formation of Reinhardt’s religious sensibility.⁴⁸ Merton’s friendship with Reinhardt, and his writing on Reinhardt’s work, is often used as a way of exploring the connection between Reinhardt’s art and spiritual concerns,⁴⁹ yet Corris defines the relationship in a different manner. Corris reads Reinhardt’s interest in religious texts, “in terms of their practical value as surrogates for conventional aesthetic discourse.”⁵⁰ The texts were for Reinhardt, rich “intellectually engaging resources that provided a fertile ground for the increasingly elaborate and esoteric framing of his ‘black’ paintings.”⁵¹

Reinhardt’s work attracted attention from theologians. Paul Tillich referred to the religious dimension of Reinhardt’s work through its “non-representational expression of mystic depths of experience.”⁵² The word “depth” (*Tiefe*) was particular to Tillich, who identified “God with the depth and ground of being: ‘The name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is *God*. That depth is what the word *God*

Gilman’s review of Donald Barthelme’s ‘Snow White’ in the *New Republic* of 3 June 1967, and Frank Kermode’s ‘Sense of An Ending’ (1967), which was reviewed by Leo Bersani (‘Variations On a Paradigm’) in the *New York Times* on 11 June 1967.” David Patten “[ONENESS] David Patten: Notes on Ad Reinhardt’s unpublished and undated text,” <https://reinhardtoneness.com/introduction/> (16 May 2017). Some of these references appear to rely on conjecture, yet it is undoubtable that many of the phrases do refer to specific texts or established poetic terms within the literature of mystical writers.

⁴⁷ Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 89.

⁴⁸ Yet as Munroe puts it, “Though Reinhardt’s interest in Asia was spurred by his friendship with Merton, it developed along another trajectory. As early as 1960, critic Martin James discussed Reinhardt’s geometric abstractions in terms of his “concerns with Asian art,” which are “its prescribed proportions, codified brush strokes, ritualized creations.” Martin James, “Today’s Artists: Reinhardt,” in *Portfolio and Art News Annual* 3 (June 1960): 61, in Munroe, “Art of Perceptual Experience,” n.p.

⁴⁹ Corris lists, Joseph Masheck, “Five Unpublished Letters from Ad Reinhardt to Thomas Merton and Two in Return,” *Artforum*, 17/4 (December 1978): 23-27. Naomi Vine, “The Total Dark Sublime: An Interpretive Analysis of the Late Black Paintings of Ad Reinhardt – 1960-67,” (PhD. Diss. University of Chicago, 1989). Niomi Vine, “Mandala and Cross,” *Art in America* (November 1991): 124-33. Paul J. Spaeth, “The Road to Simplicity Followed by Merton’s Friends: Ad Reinhardt and Robert Lax,” *Merton Annual*, 13 (2000): 245-56.

⁵⁰ Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 90.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵² Paul Tillich, “Art,” in *Newsweek*, Aug. 23, (1954): 53, in Lippard, *Ad Reinhardt*, 172.

means.”⁵³ Martin Leiner explains that Tillich posited “a translation of the idea of foundational revelation into a new language; [a] metaphorical language of God as depth.”⁵⁴ Linked to a psychology of religion, Tillich affirmed the role of religious symbols as initiators of “the experience of the dimension of this depth in the human soul.”⁵⁵ So it is fair to say that the abstract monochrome painting might function as such a symbol; a gateway for a ‘depth of experience’ as an experience of the divine. This translates in Hotere’s work, accentuated by his use of specific symbolism.

Merton also considered Reinhardt’s works within a particularly religious context, affirming a place for art as “a calculated trap for meditation.”⁵⁶ According to Corris, Merton projected a religious quality onto Reinhardt’s black paintings and used one he received as a gift as an aid for prayer.⁵⁷ Merton endorsed a contemplative practice that was unmediated, yet was also open to the use of images in aiding prayer.⁵⁸ Writing on Reinhardt’s small cruciform painting that Merton received as a gift, he states:

As though immersed in darkness and trying to emerge from it... You have to look hard to see the cross. One must turn away from everything else and concentrate on the picture as though peering through a window into the night... I should say a very ‘holy’ picture – helps prayer – an ‘image’ without features to accustom the mind at once to the night of prayer – and to help one set aside trivial and useless images that wander into prayer and spoil it.⁵⁹

Merton’s response to Reinhardt’s work presents one way of reading Reinhardt from a theological perspective that in this case encourages the *use* of images within religious life, rather than functioning as a text for theological analysis. An interface between the

⁵³ Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948), 63, in Martin Leiner, “Tillich on God,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell Re Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 44.

⁵⁴ Leiner, “Tillich on God,” 44, 53.

⁵⁵ Tillich, *Main Works/Hauptwerke*, vol. 4., ed. Carl Heinz Ratschow (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987-92), 398, in Leiner, “Tillich on God,” 46.

⁵⁶ Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (London, 1973), 105 in Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 89.

⁵⁷ Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 90.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁹ Thomas Merton, *The Journals of Thomas Merton*, vol. III: *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk’s True Vocation, 1953 – 1960*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco, 1996), 139 – 40, cited in Paul J. Spaeth, “The Road to Simplicity Followed by Merton’s Friends: Ad Reinhardt and Robert Laz,” *Merton Annual*, 13 (2000): 250, cited in Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 88.

practice of religion and modern art is clear here. It also supports an understanding of Hotere's reference to the idea of meditation.

Merton was a scholar in Zen Buddhism and Christian mysticism. He approached contemplative prayer from an integrated position, drawing upon traditions within Hinduism and Buddhism and positioning himself within the genealogy of St John of the Cross. For Merton, St John of the Cross does "not necessarily signify a complete renunciation of sensation, but allows for another mode of being within a sensual life."⁶⁰ On the surface, "the dark night of the soul" as a metaphor for the "denudation of the soul's appetites and gratifications,"⁶¹ reflects similar orientations within Buddhist thought. Like Merton, Reinhardt also attended D.T. Suzuki's lectures on Zen Buddhism in the 1950s.⁶² The influence of Buddhist thought on artists in the 1950s and 1960s had a significant impact on their practices,⁶³ yet as Munroe puts it, "Buddhism per se was not their subject."⁶⁴

An art that resides in an intuitive revelation of the specific, by gross ahistoricism and superficial conflations of Buddhism's highly complex and distinct metaphysical systems, produced a radical platform for American art in the 1960s. From Reinhardt to Irwin, the Buddhist view of mind in which no trace of intentionality is left and in which distinctions between being and nonbeing, immanence and transcendence, and subject and object are deconstructed was transformative as a creative methodology.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 89.

⁶¹ Kieran Kavanaugh, ed., *John of the Cross: Selected Writings* (New York, 1987), 64, cited in Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 193.

⁶² These happened at Columbia University in the 1950s. Reinhardt also spoke on Zen with artists such as Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, and Barnett Newman. (A group of artists and writers interested in the same ideas: the Philip Pavia's Artists Club). Reinhardt was also a trustee on the board of the Foundation for Art, Religion and Culture (FARC) – an organisation that fostered conversation between artists and theologians. Apparently, Reinhardt also made snide remarks about artists Rothko and Motherwell and Barnett Newman's involvement in commissions to decorate chapels (synagogue in Motherwell's case) and Newman's aspiration to paint the *Stations of the Cross*. Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 86.

⁶³ See: Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, *Invisible Thread: Buddhist Spirit in Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (Staten Island, N.Y.: Snug Harbor Cultural Center, 2004). David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶⁴ Munroe, "Art of Perceptual Experience," n.p.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Munroe believes Merton's "particular Orientalism...contributed to a new iteration of Asian rhetoric in American art that recast the art object as a specific focus of contemplation and perceptual experience aimed at transforming consciousness."⁶⁶ The format of Reinhardt's rules for painting resembles that of the Zen Buddhist *koan* – they are teaching devices and phrases for meditation that exemplify non-duality. The phrases often employ imagery of paired opposites, addressing the non-duality of the subject / object relation and the notion of 'pure consciousness.' According to Corris, Merton's view of Zen affirmed an "explosive liberation from one-dimensional conformism, a recovery of unity which is not the suppression of opposites but a simplicity beyond opposites."⁶⁷ He argues:

The bridging of opposites that occur within spiritual enlightenment, involves the integration of the body and mind, which was integral to the encounter with Reinhardt's black paintings.⁶⁸

McEvelley presents the Eastern influence upon Reinhardt as a significant motivator for his philosophical concerns, and positions him as an artist who represented "ultimate reductionism."⁶⁹ McEvelley claims that the geometric shapes within Reinhardt's paintings are a reference to a specific mandala, made up of four squares.⁷⁰ McEvelley does not refer to specific texts that Reinhardt read but refers to the influence of Chinese and Japanese painting manuals with their basis in Ch'an or Zen Buddhism.⁷¹ A tradition based on emptiness or *shunyata* which was connected to the space of paintings. (Here I think of Viladesau's passing inclusion of Chinese landscape artists to highlight the notion of particularity in connection with the Void, or the Mahāyana Buddhist notion

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 140 in Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 91.

⁶⁸ Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*, 16.

⁶⁹ McEvelley, "Seeking the Primal Through Paint," 75.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 75. McEvelley does not elaborate.

⁷¹ Ibid., 75. McEvelley cites Japanese painter, Kubota who "often declared he hoped to live until he might feel justified in discarding color and employing *sumi* (black) alone for any and all effects in painting." Henry Bowie, *On the Laws of Japanese Painting* in Ibid., 75.

tathātā (suchness) “as the positive aspect of the Void (*śūnya*)”).⁷² McEvilley cites Osvald Siren’s explanation that supports this view:

Space was not to them [Chinese painters of the T’ang and Sung dynasties] a cubic volume that would be geometrically constructed, it was something illimitable and incalculable which might be to some extent suggested by the relation of forms and tonal values but which always extended beyond every material indication and carried a suggestion of the infinite...

...When fully developed as in the compositions of the Ch’an painters, where the forms often are reduced to a minimum in proportion to the surrounding emptiness, the enveloping space becomes like an echo or a reflection of the Great Void, which is the very essence of the painter’s intuitive mind.⁷³

McEvilley goes on to explain that the Buddhist notion of “emptiness” is a “creative principle which makes room for things to happen in – and at the same time the extinguishing principle, the black hole through which all would-be entities pass away.”⁷⁴ For McEvilley, this notion of space is a “a symbol of the Great Void” defining the monochrome painting as an object “which apotheosizes empty space.”⁷⁵ According to McEvilley, the Zen Buddhist philosophy that Reinhardt was interested in, sits within a wider lineage of thought systems: the notion of Prime Matter, *zimzum* and the “immaterial zones” like that of Klein. For him, the Buddhist notion “‘vivid’ emptiness” as a negative concept, falls in line with the negative theology of Plotinus.⁷⁶ The formalist rhetoric that was also affiliated with Reinhardt’s work arguably parallels the reductionism associated with metaphysical frames of reference. Ultimately, he claims that Reinhardt’s “extreme formalist,” or “art-for-art’s sake” position, is a reference to

⁷² Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 161-162.

⁷³ Osvald Siren, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting*, (New York: Schocken, 1971) 95, 97, cited in McEvilley, “Seeking the Primal Through Paint,” 75-76.

⁷⁴ McEvilley, “Seeking the Primal Through Paint,” 75.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* McEvilley cites Herbert Guenther: “What we see and immediately experience is nothing determinate or definite which any adjective referring to a specific quality can designate. It is an utter openness which nevertheless is emotionally moving and aesthetically vivid, even more so than anything else.” Herbert Guenther, *Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971), 21, cited in *Ibid.*

the “the style of the Ch’an and Zen books on painting.”⁷⁷ From a standpoint of comparative religion however, the confluence of differing cultural and religious thought requires a more nuanced interpretive approach. McEvilley concludes by referring to Reinhardt’s comments on the Buddhist three roots of evil: passion, ill will, and delusion, as being central to Reinhardt’s artistic practice which sought a sense of purity: “The pure painting can rise only from a purified mind...”⁷⁸ This makes way for “the absolute monochrome, the ‘last painting,’ which Reinhardt called ‘the pure icon.’”⁷⁹

To consider Reinhardt’s references to Buddhist philosophies more broadly, Kay Larson draws attention to the entrenched understanding of the spiritual in art as envisioned in terms of dualist thought. Kandinsky and Donald Kuspit are in the firing line, with their notion of the spiritual as embedded in notions of immateriality. Yet early pioneers of contemporary art (John Cage and Marcel Duchamp are primary examples) sought to dissolve the divide between art and life, or the spiritual and everyday life. Buddhist practice reflects “a ceaseless return to ordinary things” where “immanence and transcendence” [are] “exactly one and the same,” Larson writes; “What is the subject of “spiritual art,” then, if not daily life?”⁸⁰

There is clear evidence that Hotere was aware of the Zen Buddhism of Suzuki. In the margins of a working drawing entitled, *Black Paintings. Hotere '69* (ref. 26) , held in the Hocken Collections, is a red tipped pen inscription that states: “All is black and there is no black? (Suzuki).”⁸¹ In the same collection, inscribed on an earlier series, (*Working drawings for Black Paintings. Hotere '65*, ref. 27), is the phrase, “Zero is round, zero is black, zero is zero,” which relates to the titles of the works exhibited in

⁷⁷ McEvilley, “Seeking the Primal Through Paint,” 76.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 77.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Kay Larson, “Shaping the Unbounded: One Life, One Art,” in *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, ed. Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 62-63, 72.

⁸¹ See Ralph Hotere, “Working drawings for Black Paintings. All is black and there is no black (Suzuki),” 1969, pencil, red fibre tipped pen & ballpoint pen on paper: 695 x 435 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, A688 b /a5214. I was not able to find a source text for the phrase attributed to Suzuki.

Zero: an exhibition of paintings (1967).⁸² The titles Hotere attributed to the works within this show are, almost word for word, a reference to a collaborative poem by Heinz Mack (b.1931), Otto Piene (1928-2014), and Günther Uecker (b. 1930) who called themselves “Group Zero” or “Zero.” Said not to have presented a manifesto, this poem comes closest to the idea:

Zero is silence. Zero is the beginning. Zero is round. Zero spins. Zero is the moon. The sun is Zero. Zero is white. The desert Zero. The sky above Zero. The night –. Zero flows. The eye Zero. Navel. Mouth. Kiss. The milk is round. The flower Zero the bird. Silently. Floating. I eat Zero, I drink Zero, I sleep Zero, I am awake Zero, I love Zero. Zero is beautiful. dynamo dynamo dynamo. The trees in springtime, the snow, fire, water, sea. Red orange yellow green indigo blue violet Zero Zero rainbow. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold and silver, sound and smoke. Traveling circus Zero. Zero is silence. Zero is the beginning. Zero is round. Zero is Zero.⁸³

The titles of the works in Hotere’s *Zero, an exhibition of paintings* read as follows:

1. ZERO IS SILENCE, 2. ZERO BEGINNING, 3. ZERO IS ROUND, 4. ZERO FLOWING, 5. THE SUN ZERO, 6. ZERO IS WHITE, 7. 3 2 1 ZERO, 8. RED, 9. ORANGE, 10. YELLOW, 11. GREEN, 12. BLUE, 13. INDIGO, 14. VIOLET, 15. THE NIGHT ZERO, 16. ZERO SILENT, 17. ZERO IS ZERO.⁸⁴

The German artists’ group Zero (1957-66) was founded by Mack and Piene with the interest in combatting the subjectivity of abstract expressionism, and affirming collaborative practices, which attracted extended international interest from like-minded artists, referred to as the ZERO network which was active from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. Arguably Hotere could be named among them. Along with an emphasis on collaboration, the Zero group shared an interest in “color [usually in the form of the

⁸² See Ralph Hotere, “Working drawings for Black Paintings. Zero is round, zero is black, zero is zero,” 1965, pencil & ballpoint pen on paper: 585 x 460 mm Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, A688 c /a5215.

⁸³ Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, and Günther Uecker, poem originally published in German on poster and in leaflet for *ZERO – Der neue Idealismus, poetisches Manifest* (Berlin: Galerie Diogenes, 1963). <https://www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/network-2> (Accessed 8 February 2018).

⁸⁴ Cited in Khan, “Figuring Desire,” 357.

monochrome] light, motion. Space and seriality.”⁸⁵ Yves Klein was counted among the ZERO group having made an influential connection with its founders in 1957. His monochromes, and use of the elements, fire and so on, and his preference for collaborative practice were also undertaken by the group. Klein contributed writing to the journal *Zero* (of which three issues were published from 1958-1961). The choice of the name Zero itself sheds interpretive light on Hotere’s appropriation of their phrases. Piene states:

From the beginning we looked upon the term not as an expression of nihilism—or a Dada-like gag, but as a word indicating a zone of silence and of pure possibilities for a new beginning as at the count-down when rockets take off—zero if the incommensurable zone in which the old state turns into the new.⁸⁶

Hotere also makes reference to the notion of the void in a number of ways, but his interpretation does not seem to proffer a sense of absence. The exhibition titled *Zero, an exhibition of paintings* (see ref. 28), encouraged meditation as “a personal discovery in a seeming void.”⁸⁷ The connection between the notion of zero, as the void, as black, as round, emerges again in a much later work, made in collaboration with Bill Culbert, and entitled, *VOID*, (2006, ref. 29). The work consists of a single circle of light.

The notion of Zero has a wide range of interpretive associations. A dictionary of symbols provides an initial interpretation: “Non-being, mysteriously connected with unity as its opposite and its reflection; it is symbolic of the latent and potential and is the ‘Orphic Egg’...Because of its circular form it signifies eternity.”⁸⁸ A Chinese concept of Zero aligns the definition with Tao: “At the very heart of Chinese Taoism is the

⁸⁵ Blair Asbury Brooks, “How the Zero Group Became One of Art History’s Most Viral Movements,” *Artspace*, 5 Nov 2014, https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/art_market/zero-group-52526 (accessed 8 February 2018). The range of artists who affiliated with ZERO were also engaged in other movements: “arte povera, conceptual art, fluxus, happenings, kinetic art, minimalism and nouveau réalisme.” Ann Lee Morgan *Historical Dictionary of Contemporary Art* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 421.

⁸⁶ Piene in Blair Asbury Brooks, “How the Zero Group Became One of Art History’s Most Viral Movements,” https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/art_market/zero-group-52526 (Accessed 8 February 2018).

⁸⁷ Hotere, *Zero, an exhibition of paintings*, n.p. cited in Kahn Khan, “Figuring Desire,” 119.

⁸⁸ “Zero” J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. by Jack Sage (Mineola, New York: Dover, 2002), n.p.

mystical concept of the cipher as the Void or Ultimate Nothingness from which Yin and Yang emerge. This Chinese concept of Zero is referred to philosophically as Tao, Wu-Nien, and Wu-Wei.”⁸⁹

The Tao, literally, the way or path, is named variously as formless, nameless, the cause of all motion, the maker of all form. Out of the Tao emerges “Teh,” the strength, vitality, and virtue of all living beings. Tao as Zero is the source of “Teh” as One. Teh further divides into Yin and Yang, the feminine and the masculine as Two. The Tao is that which is beyond all forms, thoughts and conceptions.⁹⁰

Mark C. Taylor places Reinhardt alongside Mondrian and Malevich, with their reference to the notion of the “void” that posited presence not absence: “An absence that is not absence but presence.”⁹¹ Taylor sees a correlation between the spiritual motivations of Reinhardt and Malevich (political and cultural differences aside): “Both sought immediate union with the Real through a process of abstraction in which the removal of signifiers reveals the *presence* of the transcendental signified.”⁹²

As Lippard points out, and Taylor confirms, Reinhardt’s work should rightly be understood as “an artistic *via negativa*.”⁹³ Reinhardt can be contextualised by modernist artistic interest in esoteric thought within the lineage of Western theological and philosophical thought that stems back to neoplatonism.⁹⁴ His work reads as the penultimate example of the “inward turn” within the development of modern art.⁹⁵ For Taylor, the relationship between kataphatic theology, apophatic theology and apophatic

⁸⁹ Wu-Nien: “The Buddhist concept of No-Thought, or No-Mind. As No Mind, Wu-Nien is the idea of an emptying of the lesser or outer self to reveal the true self, characterised as No-Thought; i.e., beyond ordinary thought. Here the concept of Zero is that which is beyond normal perception.” Wu-Wei: “The Buddhist concept of Non-Action. Wu-Wei represents the action experienced at the time of enlightenment (Satori), in which all previous action comes to No-Action. It is also action based on will rather than thought. Here the concept of Zero is that which is beyond all acting and actions.” David Allen Hulse, *The Eastern Mysteries: An Encyclopaedic Guide to the Sacred Languages and Magical Systems of the World: The Key of it all, Book I* (St Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2004), 538.

⁹⁰ Hulse, *The Eastern Mysteries*, 538.

⁹¹ Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 50.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 83.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

theology remains within the grasp of romantic idealist philosophy that privileges the realm of aesthetics as the path to the divine. He argues that negative theology remains within the lineage of Western “theoesthetics” or ontotheology.⁹⁶ Reinhardt is indebted to Western theoesthetics with the “desire to be united with the Origin”: “When abstraction is complete, union is achieved in the total darkness of the black canvas.”⁹⁷ Reinhardt interprets this divine dark as a “mystical ascent:” “a nothingness that he ... identifies with God.”⁹⁸

Mystical ascent – separation from error, evil

- “ from world of appearances,
Sense attractions
- “the divine dark” – “luminous
darkness”⁹⁹

For Taylor, Reinhardt’s form of mysticism contains a *telos* in terms of the process of union with the divine. Of specific interest here is Taylor’s affirmation of Reinhardt’s artistic method of negation, defined as a form of *aphairesis*, as opposed to the more commonly known *apophasis*.¹⁰⁰ He argues that this form of negation might better fit the process of artistic abstraction as it relays the notion of removing or erasing “the prosthetic supplements” of “forms and figures” to arrive at the “origin,” or “oneness,” enabling unmediated union with the divine.¹⁰¹ Taylor provides the following explanation:

Apophasis negates by stating an opposite...Aphaeresis, by contrast, negates by abstracting or subtracting particular qualities from an entity. The penultimate aim of aphaeresis is the essence of the entity under consideration; its ultimate

⁹⁶ Taylor writes: “Though apophasis and aphaeresis reverse or invert the structure of kataphatic theology, they do not subvert the essential presuppositions of Western theoesthetics.” Ibid., 87.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: Viking Press, 1975) 105, cited in Ibid., 87.

¹⁰⁰ Taylor follows Raoul Mortley, *Word to Silence: The Rise and Fall of the Logos*, vols. 1 and 2 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986) in Ibid., 86.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 87.

aim is the essential One that underlies the many that compose the phenomenal world.¹⁰²

The creation of the cosmos is understood as a “prolonged process in which layers of reality gradually accumulate.”¹⁰³ Taylor continues,

Apharesis reverses this creative process through the removal or stripping away of successive supplements... [it] functions like a ritual purification that allows the initiate to draw near the purity of the origin. This origin is the “darkness” that mystics deem divine.¹⁰⁴

At this juncture, Taylor returns to Reinhardt’s black as a form of *presence*, not absence. This reading also dovetails with a technical understanding of black: as the non-reflective absorption of light. In Taylor’s words, black “issues from the *total presence* of light.”¹⁰⁵

DARK

“Black,” medium of the mind

.....

Leave temple images behind

Rise above beauty, beyond virtues, inscrutable, indescribable

Self-transcendence revealed yet unrevealed

Undifferentiated unity, oneness, no divisions, no multiplicity

No consciousness of anything

No consciousness of consciousness

All distinctions disappear in darkness

The darkness is the brilliance numinous, resonance.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ibid., 86.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰⁶ Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art*, 90, cited in Ibid., 85.

Summary

A comparison between Reinhardt and Hotere's use of black, reveals the emergence of alternative analogies that are essentially able to reach the same ends. When I visited Reinhardt's work, I thought that the reflective glass hindered a direct encounter with the work, and that it contributed to the conceptual difficulty of viewing the works. Yet the presence of the glass inadvertently related Reinhardt's works more directly to Hotere's interest in including the viewer within the reflective surface of the work. These artists differ with regard to their preferred surface choices. This difference has significant conceptual implications.

Hotere adds a dancing reflective surface to this total presence of black. The black object fully absorbs light, reflecting nothing, but in the reflective surfaces of Hotere's work we find the world and ourselves within the black. Taylor's reading of Michelangelo Pistoletto's mirror works offers another way of understanding Hotere's works in contrast with Reinhardt's. For Taylor, the mirrored surface inhabits a "strange space" between the two main modernist tendencies of abstraction and figuration.¹⁰⁷ Mirror works, Taylor writes, "force me to look at myself looking at myself looking at [the] work...reflection is unavoidable."¹⁰⁸ The single direction of the gaze that Reinhardt insisted upon, is instead a "ceaseless oscillation of the oppositeness between which human experience is suspended."¹⁰⁹ A reflective surface records but leaves no trace; it "receives everything but retains nothing."¹¹⁰ According to Taylor, this encounter disrupts the inward turn of the gaze: "To encounter the nothingness that shadows reflection is to glimpse a specularity that is not Hegelian. Hegel...defines spirit as '*pure* self-recognition in absolute otherness.'"¹¹¹ Through Pistoletto, Taylor observes the

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 280.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

demise of traditional metaphysics, as the mirrored surface deconstructs an understanding of traditional “philosophy of speculation.”¹¹²

The asymmetrical, dialectical or even antithetical relationship that Hotere has with Reinhardt alters an understanding of the mystical sensibility of Hotere’s work as it might have been exemplified in Reinhardt. Yet consideration of their relationship assists the interpretation of Hotere’s work. Attention to the influence of Eastern and Western theologies upon the reception of Reinhardt’s work helps to support a theological engagement with Hotere’s work that affirms an embodied phenomenological encounter. More importantly, it sets up an argument for reading ‘immaterial,’ ‘pure,’ ‘spiritual’ abstract art that affirms a non-dualist understanding of spirituality.

Hotere’s multifaceted form of monochrome is differentiated from Reinhardt’s, in reference to apophatic traditions that resist the modernist grasp of a singular vision for union with the Absolute. The bodily experience of viewing Hotere’s and Reinhardt’s respective works differs. While similarities can be made, Hotere’s visual analogies for contemplation relate to the subjectivity of the divine/human encounter through a literary sensibility. Regardless of the particularities, what emerges here is a basis for consideration of theological aesthetics as an experience of the divine that finds its basis in human sensory experience. Hotere’s invitation for the viewer to approach his works as a form of meditation, and Merton’s reference to Reinhardt’s works in religious terms support this departure point. The abstract monochrome more broadly speaking, has roots within the tradition of aesthetics that founded a modern religious sensibility within consciousness, which has caused some art historians, like McEvelley, to name the “metaphysical monochrome [as] the last gasp of the Romantic ideology of art...”¹¹³

The monochrome painting may be the only important religious icon produced in the twentieth century: the expanse of a single color mounted at altar level and gazed at by the faithful in a silence as of worship or transcendent intimation.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Taylor elaborates: “The drama Pistoletto’s art stages decomposes the philosophy of speculation that marks the close of Western metaphysics. This decomposition effectively deconstructs reflection by figuring the refused underside of theoesthetics.” *Ibid.*, 280.

¹¹³ McEvelley, “Seeking the Primal Through Paint,” 82.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

Hotere and Klein

Hotere can be compared to Klein regarding works that were made utilizing the natural chemical and physical processes of weathering their materials over time. Klein also offers another way of understanding the abstract monochrome from a philosophical and spiritual perspective. As McEvilley puts it, his philosophy is representative of the Hegelian notion that “all Western civilization was on the verge of ascending out of ordinary causality into some spiritual beyond.”¹¹⁵ Klein’s Roman Catholic heritage, also provides a way of reading Christian tradition in the context of the modernist monochrome.

Catholic conceptual horizons

Denys Riout claims that the theology of the Incarnation is a “major conceptual horizon in which [Klein’s] work is located.”¹¹⁶ With a Colin McCahonian ring, Klein himself referred at one point to the sacramental role of the painter: “Like Christ, the painter says Mass by painting and gives the body of his soul as nourishment to others; he brings about, on a miniature scale, the miracle of the Holy Communion in each painting.”¹¹⁷ Klein’s religious sensibility while “deep-rooted” was “intuitive” and “rarely explicit,” as Riout explains.¹¹⁸ But for Riout, the “conceptual horizon” of the Incarnation, “enables us to understand the system of binary articulations” embedded in his work.¹¹⁹

Klaus Ottmann outlines two central theses that were based on Klein’s Catholicism: Klein’s *ethics of grace* and his *aesthetics of negativity*.¹²⁰ Ottmann suggests the Christian concept of grace, for Klein, is transposed and embodied within colour:

Like Christ, who does not simply bestow grace, but *embodies* the grace that he bestows upon humanity, Klein does not simply give out his pure sensibility, but

¹¹⁵ McEvilley, *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt*, 233.

¹¹⁶ Denys Riout, *Yves Klein: Expressing the Immaterial* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2004), 135.

¹¹⁷ Yves Klein, “Dimanche,” in *Overcoming the Problematics of Art: The Writings of Yves Klein*, trans. by Klaus Ottmann (Putnam, Conn: Spring Publications, 2007), 131.

¹¹⁸ Riout, *Yves Klein*, 135.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹²⁰ Klaus Ottmann, *Yves Klein: Works/Writings* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2010), 75. These were outlined in Klein’s texts “Overcoming the Problematics of Art” and “The Monochrome Adventure,” respectively.

immaterializes it. His readers, or *lecteurs*, partake in this immaterialization by “reading” the monochrome and becoming immersed in the void of pure color.¹²¹

The notion of grace here is defined in neo-platonic terms. Ottmann cites the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria which “promoted salvation by deification, of humans partaking in the nature of God in order to restore humankind to the paradisaal state of perfection.”¹²² Ottmann suggests that Klein offers a “soteriological reinterpretation of the creative act.”¹²³ An idiosyncratic theology of art emerges here, through the doctrine of the Incarnation. Yet how it might be translated for Hotere, remains ambiguous.

Collaborative practice

Klein’s ‘ethics of grace’ emphasised the practice of collaboration, towards dismantling the ego, as Klein believed that by definition, grace should be shared. One of his attempts at collaboration involved the invitation of live models to act as “living brushes” in his *Anthropométries* (c. from 1960, ref. 30) series. Female models were invited to cover themselves with blue paint to make impressions on white surface supports. These works ranged from silhouette forms of the body, to complete monochromes through the model’s movements on blank surfaces. While his intentions may have been noble, these works are a feminist’s nightmare. Klein took the role of artistic director, guiding the models, but not touching them, within the process of composition. The dynamic of power in the relation between the artist, as the detached orchestrator, and the models’ bodies, as objects and tools (living brushes) for the purpose of conveying his philosophy, is one of control and domination.

Yet Klein also sought to disrupt the notion of the singular artist as genius, through an approach that sought to affirm the notion of collaboration towards an enlightened end (however questionable that looks from a feminist perspective). Theoretically, Klein upheld the notion that: “In an art without problematics we shall attain eternal life and immortality. Immortality is conquered collaboratively. This is one of the laws of man’s

¹²¹ Ibid., 87.

¹²² Ibid., 87.

¹²³ Ibid., 87.

nature with respect to the universe!”¹²⁴ According to Riout, Klein’s use of the body in his work was also a “symmetrical” move that Klein made at the same time as he was establishing his notions of immateriality in blue. Here Klein makes an explicit connection between colour and the (female) body. Riout reads these separate series through a theology of the Incarnation, as Klein presented “two states of painting together.”¹²⁵

The return of the body comes to remind us of the two complementary topics of the Christic Incarnation. The entire theology of the icon, and then the entire Catholic tradition of images, is based on the double nature of the son of God become man and, as such, representable.¹²⁶

However questionable Klein’s particular approach to gender relations, he sets up a way of reading art and theology together. There is an inherent sacramental sensibility at play in these works, as the bodies of the models serve as conduits for the presentation of the immateriality of pure sensibility. They could be interpreted as a form of embodied apophaticism. Klein’s lifelong involvement with the practice of judo also supports the conceptual framework of these works. For instance, Ottmann observes:

Assisted by his knowledge of judo, Klein’s theology of the flesh became the void incarnate. Each of his living brushes, their skin saturated with blue paint, held within themselves pictorial reality and emptiness as they partook in the ritual of sacrament, the communion with the white paper, like the judoka imprint made by Klein’s body, both physically and spiritually, on the white judo mat...¹²⁷

Material and immaterial sensibilities

To consider the particular metaphysics of Klein’s monochromes, his own statements of relation to other artists within the tradition offer some insight. Klein differentiated his form of the abstract monochrome from artists like Malevich and Reinhardt. He made a

¹²⁴ Klein, “Overcoming the Problematics of Art,” in *Overcoming the Problematics of Art*, 62.

¹²⁵ Riout, *Yves Klein*, 86.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

¹²⁷ Ottmann, *Yves Klein*, 111.

cartoon sketch of Malevich copying one of his own compositions with a Kandinsky work crumpled on the floor. Pinned on the wall above, are iconographic motifs, crosses and geometric shapes. Klein placed himself chronologically before Malevich in terms of his aims: “In effect, MALEVICH had infinity before him, while I am within it. One does not represent the infinite, nor does one produce it...”¹²⁸ As Ottmann believes, Klein also differentiated himself from Kandinsky’s spiritual vision; refusing to “[single] out the spiritual at the expense of the material.”¹²⁹ Klein did not claim to be a “mystic,” as he puts it: “I do not preach obscurantism but, quite the contrary, the reconquest of pure sensibility.”¹³⁰ It is easier to understand an apophatic sensibility within the frame of a black canvas, eliciting a clearer delineation between darkness and light. So perhaps what Klein offers is the converse: rather than an embodied apophaticism his work might read as an art world form of kataphaticism: “Color for itself is what I wish to create as a presence.”¹³¹ Hotere departs from Klein at this point.

Klein’s sensibility is perhaps better understood through his turn to the materiality of the universe to delineate his form of abstraction. At a crucial juncture of Klein’s artistic development, we find the literary and poetic influence of Gaston Bachelard: “First there is *nothing*, then there is a *deep* nothing, then there is a blue *depth*.”¹³² Klein explains: “All colors bring forth specific associative ideas, tangible or psychological, while blue suggests, at most, the sea and sky, and they, after all, are in actual nature what is most abstract.”¹³³ He continues:

I decided to retain the classical rectangular format in order not to psychologically shock the viewer who, thus, would see a color surface and not flat color form. What I desired....was to present...an opening onto the world of represented color, a window opened onto the freedom to become impregnated with the immeasurable state of color in a limitless, infinite manner. My goal was

¹²⁸ Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure,” in *Overcoming the Problematics of Art*, 170.

¹²⁹ Ottmann, *Yves Klein*, 105.

¹³⁰ Klein, “Comment et pourquoi, en 1957...” Paris: Yves Klein Archives, in Ottmann, *Yves Klein*, 105.

¹³¹ Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure,” in *Overcoming the Problematics of Art*, 157

¹³² Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, trans. by Edith R Farrell and C. Frederick Farrell (Dallas: The Dallas Institute Publications, 2002), 168, in Klein, “Lecture at the Sorbonne,” in *Overcoming the Problematics of Art*, 86.

¹³³ Klein, “Lecture at the Sorbonne,” 86.

to present to the public the potential for the pictorial matter of color itself to be illuminated, for all things physical – stone, brick, bottles, clouds – to become an abject for the journey of the viewer’s sensibility into the limitless cosmic sensibility of everything in order to be impregnated.

Such an ideal viewer of my color surfaces would then become, only in regard to sensibility of course, “extradimensional” to such degree that he would be “all in all” – impregnated with the sensibility of the universe.¹³⁴

In addition to his preoccupation with blue, Klein also worked with the elements of water and fire, citing Bachelard for conceptual support. For Klein, “Fire...is the memory of nature.”¹³⁵ He seemed to approach his work with fire and water in the same manner as his ideas on a sensibility of blue: as “principles of universal explanation.”¹³⁶ Klein differentiates himself from the dark monochromes that posited a negative theology, to instead concern himself with a *réalisme mystique* (mystical realism), which according to Ottmann, combined “Christian doctrine with a realist philosophy that had no hidden assumptions or prepositions.”¹³⁷ Bachelard’s writings supported Klein’s thinking through a poetics of material reality in phenomenological and psychological philosophical terms. His goal however, was to seek the “indefinable,” in the manner Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) employed it:

Woe to the picture which shows to a man gifted with imagination nothing more than finish. The merit of the picture is the indefinable: it is just the thing which goes beyond precision: in a word, it is what the soul has added to the colors and to the lines.¹³⁸

For Klein, colour carried the weight of his task: “Color is always experienced as impregnated with faith and profound love. One identifies with it – while, on the other

¹³⁴ Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure,” 155.

¹³⁵ Klein, “Lecture at the Sorbonne,” 89.

¹³⁶ Bachelard, *The Psychology of Fire*, trans. by Alan C.M. Ross (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 7, in Klein, “Lecture at the Sorbonne,” 89.

¹³⁷ Ottmann, *Yves Klein*, 105.

¹³⁸ *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. by Walter Pach (New York: Covici, Friede, Inc., 1937), 711, in Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure,” 161.

hand, a drawing can only be read, interpreted.”¹³⁹ Klein posited an ontological interpretation of colour: “In the final analysis, the line can only suggest; whereas color “is.””¹⁴⁰ Seeking complete immersion, Klein’s monochromes instigate a broader phenomenological experience. The painted product itself acts as a window onto the expanse of pure sensibility.

Drawing Hotere into conversation with these works, in an inverted sense, his black paintings read as openings onto the expanse of the night sky. Hotere is night to Klein’s day. According to Young, Hotere also sought to teach his viewers “love” through “offering us a chance to progress by giving us what may be the first opportunity for our own betterment & self-discovery.”¹⁴¹ For Hotere, this was located in the notion of meditation, as “a personal discovery in a seeming void.”¹⁴²

A hierarchy of conceptual development can be traced through Klein’s oeuvre with regard to his interpretation of colour: white, gold, pink, blue, all reflect his conceptual interests. Klein was specific about placing his art within a neo-platonic paradigm. His particular view, according to McEvelley, posited that “essential unity and apparent plurality are mediated by an emanational theology: the universe emanates out of primal unity in seven stages.”¹⁴³ This is a hierarchal view that places the corporeal plane – the human realm – on the lowest rung. McEvelley also identifies a teleological tendency in Klein, one that upheld the Romantic vision of utopia, orientated towards the belief that humanity was about to break through to realms of immateriality:

We will become aerial men, we will know the force of upward attraction, toward space, toward the void and the totality at one and the same time; when the forces of terrestrial attraction have been dominated in this way we will literally levitate to total physical and spiritual liberty.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure,” 160.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 160.

¹⁴¹ Young, “Love plus Zero/no Limit,” 15.

¹⁴² Hotere in Ibid., 15.

¹⁴³ McEvelley, “Seeking the Primal Through Paint,” 59.

¹⁴⁴ Klein, “Discourse on the Occasion of Tinguely’s Exhibition in Dusseldorf, January, 1959,” trans. by Thomas McEvelley, in *Yves Klein, A Retrospective* (Houston: Institute for the Arts, Rice University, 1982), 234, in McEvelley, “Seeking the Primal Through Paint,” 60.

Klein's obsession with blue embodies his notion of immateriality: blue, as the empty sky, as a "pure spiritual condition," as the Absolute, as the "aerial" kingdom.¹⁴⁵ A Christian iconographical tradition of blue as the colour of heaven, and Goethe's colour theory also contribute to his spiritual definition of blue.

In addition to Western interpretive tradition, McEvelley draws attention to Buddhist literature as supporting the interpretation of immateriality in Klein's work, and specifically the Tibetan Buddhist notion of *Milarepa* – contemplating the sky – where there is no division nor ego projection. So in the case of Klein, the 'absolute' is above, and not embedded or underlying the 'many,' as is the case with a more closely aligned Platonic interpretation. McEvelley locates a "world-renouncing ideology"¹⁴⁶ in Klein's work, yet the expression of Klein's 'revelation of the spirituality of the flesh' frames his vision as upholding a coincidence of opposites. Here, a theology of the Incarnation is supportive. Klein broke down the colours of a flame: blue, gold and pink, which he translated, in an interview with Pierre Restany in 1961, as "the three basic colours in monochrome painting and, for me, it is a universal explanatory principle of the world."¹⁴⁷

Reading Hotere's use of gold leaf through Klein's conceptual framework adds another point of reference for Hotere interpretation. Klein began to work with gold leaf in 1949, stating: "That year was when I experienced the profound physical quality of the illumination of matter."¹⁴⁸ However, it was ten years after he had this epiphany, his notion of "the illumination of matter" entered his monochrome painting (*Monogolds* c. 1959, see ref. 31) which were understood as intermediary devices between material and

¹⁴⁵ McEvelley, "Seeking the Primal Through Paint," 60.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴⁷ Yves Klein quoted in Vanessa Morisset, "Yves Klein: Body, Colour, Immaterial," (5 October 2006 – 5 February 2007), Centre Pompidou, Public and Educational Action Unit, November 2006, <http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-klein-EN/ENS-klein-EN.htm#intro> (21 July 2017). Pink for Klein represented the physical dimension of existence: "Thus, while gold is the means of reaching the absolute, it also enables a return to the body and the fluid that sustains it, blood. For the body has a virtue: it is the source of inspiration to which the artist must constantly return. In Klein's pictorial system, this body is symbolised by pink, a colour teamed with the two others to perfect his trinity." <http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-klein-EN/ENS-klein-EN.htm#intro> (21 July 2017).

¹⁴⁸ Yves Klein quoted in Morisset, "Yves Klein," n.p. See Pierre Restany and Klaus Ottmann *Yves Klein: fire at the heart of the void*, (Washington, D.C. Spring Publications, 2005), 18.

spiritual realms and posited “a revelation of the spirituality of the flesh.”¹⁴⁹ In another series, *Ritual for the Relinquishment of the Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity Zones* (1957-59, see ref. 32), Klein considers the dual symbolism of gold in the form of performance art in which the artist sold his work as a “void ‘zone of sensibility;’” the buyer burnt the receipt, and the artist threw half of the profit, in gold flakes, into the river Seine.¹⁵⁰ The buyer then, symbolically and completely, retained the zone of immateriality.

The gold and the black of Hotere’s *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, could be read as alternate references to immateriality. Klein’s exclamation of discovery of a ‘profound physical quality of the illumination of matter,’ and his vision of immateriality, defines the intermediary qualities of monochrome painting as both emanating a notion of ultimate transcendence and illuminated matter. The luminance of the gold in Hotere’s works is both iconographical and phenomenological – in short, gold (and not white), is the opposite of divine darkness, as the (kataphatic) representation of divine presence in the (apophatic) dark.

Comparing Hotere with Klein accentuates the differences between them. Klein’s art is accompanied by an elaborate conceptuality. Once one considers the details of an artist’s practice, their ideas and their personality become inseparable. The generalised understanding of the abstract monochrome becomes particularised. The theology attached to Klein’s work is interpreted through the lens of an art practice infused with a variety of interests. Making sense of the intuitive conceptual framework through which he communicated his ideas turns up more questions than answers. Yet, Klein also offers a conceptual departure point for reading Hotere.

Klein and Hotere share an association with the Roman Catholic faith. For Klein, this emerges as an underlying conceptual support, for Hotere, the language and lyricism of Catholic symbols are embedded within his works and take on both literal and symbolic functions. Both artists were interested in collaboration, about which Klein was decidedly utopian. Hotere and Klein also maintained associations with the ZERO group

¹⁴⁹ Morisset, “Yves Klein,” n.p.

¹⁵⁰ McEvilley, “Seeking the Primal Through Paint,” 75.

and their affirmation of collaborative practice. Although Hotere was more removed. Another point of comparison emerges through Klein's conceptual framework where colour 'is' and line 'describes,' accentuating a sharp divide between Klein's blue women and Hotere's many line drawings of nudes. By no means did Hotere offer an extended manifesto on the metaphysics of his work.

Hotere and Tàpies

Hotere admired the work of the Catalan painter Antoni Tàpies.¹⁵¹ Tàpies serves as another interpretive interlocutor to assist in understanding Hotere's spiritual sensibility. Tàpies emphasised the connection between the spiritual and the material that affirmed a relationship with everyday life in a way that Reinhardt and Klein did not. Yet in common with them all, Tàpies considered art as a "support of meditation" and the artists' role as nurturing a "mystical consciousness,"¹⁵² outside of organised religion.

Tàpies sensibility was informed by a Catholic heritage which he later rejected, to instead place emphasis on the spiritual role of the artist, drawing upon a range of Eastern and Western religious, spiritual and philosophical traditions.¹⁵³ Like Hotere, Tàpies also employed the use of black in his works, and his practice was decidedly political. Tàpies made an original contribution through a form of mixed media abstract

¹⁵¹ Ralph Hotere in conversation with Kriselle Baker, February 2007, in Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 69.

¹⁵² Tàpies states: "Artistic feeling has deep connections to mystical feelings... This mystical consciousness – almost indefinable – seems fundamental for an artist. It is like a "suffering" of reality, a state of constant hypersensitivity to everything which surrounds us, good and bad, light and darkness." Tàpies, "I Am a Catalan," From "Declaracions," in *La practica se l'art* (Barcelona: Edicions Ariel, 1971), 39-43, cited in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 55. He continues: "I have never believed in the intrinsic value of art. In itself it seems to me to be nothing. What is important is its role as a spur, a springboard, which helps us attain knowledge... The work of art is a simple support of meditation, and artifice serving to fix the attention, to stabilize or excite the mind; its value can only be judged by its results." Tàpies, "I Am a Catalan," cited in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, 55-56.

¹⁵³ This brings up a wider issue with regard to the problematic of drawing from a range of spiritual and religious traditions with respect to the handling of disparate theological, historical and cultural contexts. For example, Renée Riese Hubert argues that Penrose drew upon a range of religious traditions: "Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Gnosticism, and ... Western mysticism..." formed a "unified vision... to establish immediate relationships." Renée Riese Hubert, "Antoni Tàpies Between History and Mysticism," in *Dalhousie French Studies* 21, *Art Criticism by French Poets since World War II* (Fall-Winter 1991): 109. Hubert also drew attention to Penrose's identification of Tàpies "geometric source-models" that were "almost all" from the Hindu Kamakhya Temple in Assam. Valentine Penrose, "Tàpies: les sources innommées," *L'Art vivant* 35, (December-January, 1972-73): 25, cited in Hubert, "Antoni Tàpies Between History and Mysticism," 110.

art that incorporated everyday materials, for which, by the late 1950s, he had gained an international reputation. The elevation of everyday or insignificant materials within his work became a defining feature of his practice.¹⁵⁴ Manuel Borja-Villel describes the “spiritual element of [the] materials” Tàpies uses “as ‘the transcendently spiritual in banal intranscendence.’”¹⁵⁵ But use of banal materials incorporated a philosophical and spiritual intention for his work within a Neoplatonist frame of reference.

Aesthetic contemplation and the everyday

Hotere and Tàpies find common ground through a notion of contemplation that is grounded in the everyday. Baker argues that, like Tàpies, Hotere maintains “a spiritual transcendence that is deeply contemplative,” in relation to their respective use of banal materials – the use of recycled wood, or industrial materials.¹⁵⁶ Baker also locates Tàpies political position within his reference to everyday life in his work, which is also related to his spiritual concerns. Citing Andreas Franzke: “‘Tàpies concentrated entirely on the metaphysical, spiritual aspect of sensually perceived materials. In his work, then as now, the spiritual is, as it were, encoded in the substance of which it is constituted.’”¹⁵⁷ In comparison with Reinhardt and Klein what we have here is a materially indexed definition of the spiritual in art. Each material element, and combination of elements in Tàpies’s works, was intended to reference a larger schema – as symbols or signs for ultimate reality. Tàpies also included symbolic imagery and motifs like the cross, transposing and shedding them of a strictly religious connotation, as they “constitute real elements in our psyche” on a more holistic level.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ See Tàpies, “Nothing is Mean” (1979). “Tapies, Antoni” in *Oxford Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*, 2nd ed., ed. Ian Chilvers & John Graves-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 700-701.

¹⁵⁵ Manuel J. Borja-Villel in Ann Agustí, *Tàpies: The Complete Works Volume 3: 1969-1975* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 11, cited in Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 71.

¹⁵⁶ Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 72.

¹⁵⁷ Andreas Franzke in Agustí, *Tàpies*, 13, cited in Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 71-72.

¹⁵⁸ Tàpies, *L'Art Contre l'Esthétique*, trans. by Edmond Raillard (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1978), 227-228 in Emilie A. Hobert, “Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull: towards a modern art of Combination” (M.A. diss., Bowling Green State University, 2012), 31.

Tàpies's spiritual sensibility was influenced by Eastern and Western traditions of spirituality.¹⁵⁹ Barbara Catoir, draws attention to the influence of the Western mystic Ramon Llull (c.1232- c.1315) upon Tàpies, which is further elucidated by Emilie A. Hobert.¹⁶⁰ Hobert addresses Tàpies work in particular relation to Llull's "Art of Combination," highlighting a metaphysical connection between their respective concerns, with the use of a diagrammatical system which aids the viewer towards experiencing ultimate "Reality."¹⁶¹ She identifies the influence of medieval art on Tàpies, which encompassed religious ritual and symbolism, as well as mysticism and the occult.¹⁶² Tàpies's discovery of Llull made an impression on him, and he noted Llull as "one of the international figures of Catalan thought..."¹⁶³ Tàpies had an interest in the neoplatonic system of thought that Llull espoused, including an interest in the notion of the "coincidence of opposites," believing that the "artist and the poet [are] most suited to bring [this coincidence] about."¹⁶⁴ Tàpies writes that he had a "desire to provide a cosmic theme for meditation and reflection on the beauty of the *infinite combinations* of the forms and colors of natural materials."¹⁶⁵ Tàpies labelled his aesthetic mysticism a form of "untranscendental mysticism, in the sense of [a] love of

¹⁵⁹ Manuel Borja-Villel, Serge Guilbaut, Valentine Penrose address the Eastern religious aspect of Tàpies work. Regarding Hinduism and Vedic texts see: Manuel Borja-Villel, "Tàpies. The Contemplation of Art," in *Tàpies in Perspective*, ed. Borja-Villel (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2004), 199-200. Regarding Zen Buddhism see: Serge Guilbaut, "Deliquescent Bodies with Eyelids: Conjuring Everyday Life in the 1980s," in *Tàpies: The Complete Works: Volume 5: 1982-1985*, ed. Anna Agustí (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1990), 22, cited in Hobert, "Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull," 1. Valentine Penrose, "Tàpies: les sources innommées," *L'Art vivant* 35, (December-January, 1972-73): 24-25, cited in Hubert, "Antoni Tàpies Between History and Mysticism," 111. Tàpies own writing, *Art i Espiritualitat* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1988) and *Valor de l'Art* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1993), are the primary texts in which Tàpies outlines his concerns with the relation between art and religion, according to Hobert. See also Joseph J. Schildkraut and Aurora Otero, *Depression and the spiritual in modern art: homage to Miró* (Hoboken: Wiley, 1996).

¹⁶⁰ Barbara Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, With an Introduction to the Artist's Work (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1991), 14-19, cited in Hobert, "Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull," 1.

¹⁶¹ Hobert, "Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull," 40.

¹⁶² See Tàpies, *La Valeur de l'Art* (Marseille: André Dimanche Editeur, 2001), 115 in Hobert, "Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull," 3.

¹⁶³ Antoni Tàpies in Manuel Borja-Villel "Antoni Tàpies in Print: An Interview," trans. by Dolores Garolera, *MoMA* 11 (Spring 1992): 17, cited in Hobert, "Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull," 5.

¹⁶⁴ Tàpies, *A Personal Memoir: Fragments for an Autobiography*, trans. by Josep Miquel Sobrer (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2009), 261, in cited Hobert, "Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull," 15.

¹⁶⁵ Tàpies, *A Personal Memoir*, 292, Hobert's emphasis, cited in Hobert, "Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull," 15-16.

mystery, and the desire to discover the unknown.”¹⁶⁶ The term ‘untranscendental’ is in reference to a sense of the spiritual outside of institutionalised religion. Hobert goes on to argue that Tàpies’s intention for the viewer was an experience that enabled the “possibility to access divine truths,” through his work.¹⁶⁷ Here the notion of aesthetic contemplation as a metaphor for divine contemplation comes to the fore, yet takes a different form to that of Reinhardt or Klein.¹⁶⁸ Instead the object of aesthetic contemplation is more directly linked with elements of the material world and everyday items in Tàpies’s work – socks, bicycles or sacking for example (see ref. 33).

An indexical materiality

Another way of understanding Tàpies use of banal materials as cyphers for ultimate reality, can be explained through a Piercian indexical sign system. As Jonathan Mayhew explains, the indexical sign “signifies through its existential link with its referent,” and “serves to break down the distinctions between signifier and signified and between matter and spirit.”¹⁶⁹ Mayhew continues: “[in] Tàpies’ art both signifier and [signified] are, in some sense, material; consequently both are spiritual as well.”¹⁷⁰ Tàpies inclusion of “pure” materials helped him achieve this concept: the use of “raw” material, sand for example, can indexically refer to the “totality of that thing (rock, mountain, beach).”¹⁷¹ In turn, this configuration provides a window for the viewer to “see the whole universe” in a grain of sand.¹⁷² However, the indexical sign does not provide the complete picture, as Victòria Combalia Dexeus states:

¹⁶⁶ Tàpies, *Complete Writings, Volume I: A Personal Memoir: Fragments for an Autobiography*, trans. by Josep Miquel Sobrer (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2009), 142, cited in Hobert, “Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull,” 30.

¹⁶⁷ Hobert, “Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull,” 21.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶⁹ Jonathan Mayhew, “Valente/Tàpies: The Poetics of Materiality,” in *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea*, Vol. 22, No. 1/2 (1997): 93-94. Renée Riese Hubert referred this to a “primordial convergence” in her examination of Valentine Penrose’s views on Tàpies work in Penrose, “Tàpies: les sources innommées,” 24-25 in Hubert, “Antoni Tàpies Between History and Mysticism,” 110.

¹⁷⁰ Mayhew, “Valente/Tàpies: The Poetics of Materiality,” 94.

¹⁷¹ Hobert, “Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull,” 23. Tàpies expresses the “idea that in a tiny, insignificant piece of clay one could come to see the whole universe.” Antoni Tàpies, “Nothing is too Petty,” *Tàpies in Perspective*, ed. Manuel Borja-Villel (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2004), 187, in Hobert, “Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull,” 23-24.

¹⁷² Tàpies, “Nothing is too Petty,” 187, in Hobert, “Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull,” 23-24.

[Tàpies's art is] extremely complex in its relationship to reality and its ways of representing it or, if you like, giving it to us in a work. In general terms we should speak of different procedures, among which are the *apparently illusionistic representations of the textures*, the *transposition of textures*, the *presentation of real objects* and those devices which allude to reality, or to its memory, such as *footprints* and *fingerprints*, *graphic signs* or *mnemonic images*.¹⁷³

Touch was an important aspect of Tàpies' intention for his art works – in this sense the artwork acted as a talisman, or icon, with the intention of a direct engagement with the viewer.¹⁷⁴ The logic of the icon here becomes another mode of signification, and connection between the spiritual and material. Like the divine encounter made possible through the image of a holy person, 'raw' material connects the viewer with the 'Reality' of the substance of the universe. Overall, Tàpies's intention was to avoid platonic mimesis, opting instead to work within the purview of a Neoplatonist paradigm that posits the artwork as an aid for union with, contemplation of, the divine/Reality.¹⁷⁵

Literary comparisons

Another point of comparison between Hotere and Tàpies, is their respective literary modes. Tàpies, the "poet's painter," incorporated linguistic elements, symbols, hieroglyphics, numbers, letters, and whole books in his paintings, essentially reframing the immateriality of linguistic sign within the materiality of a painting.¹⁷⁶ Mayhew highlights this material quality of Tàpies' use of text, through a comparison between the poet José Ángel Valente and Tàpies, focusing on the relationship between poetry and painting.¹⁷⁷ This is where the indexical sign provides a way of understanding the signification of Tàpies' works. In a poem on Tàpies, Valente refers to the nature of

¹⁷³ Victòria Combalia Dexeus, *Tàpies*, trans. by Kenneth Lyons (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 18-19, (Italics in original), in Mayhew, "Valente/Tàpies," 100-101.

¹⁷⁴ Antoni Tàpies, interview with Víctor Zalbidea and Victoria Paniagua, in *Tàpies L'Art Contre l'Esthétique*, trans. by Edmond Raillard (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1978), 167, in Hobert, "Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull," 25. Hobert's Translation.

¹⁷⁵ Hobert, "Antoni Tàpies and Ramon Llull," 26.

¹⁷⁶ Mayhew, "Valente/Tàpies," 100.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 98. See the prose poem on Tàpies's by José Ángel Valente published "Cinco fragmentos para Antoni Tàpies," in *Material memoria 1979-1989* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992).

Tàpies work as an aid for meditation, which involves the perception of a “process of dissolution” and leads to a state where “form is matter and matter is form.”¹⁷⁸ As Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero argues:

For Valente, Tàpies’ negation of the difference between form and matter erases the distinction between spirit and matter. Matter then becomes a part of the artist and is perceived in its essentials before it has become part of the work of art.¹⁷⁹

Reading the material poetics of Valente and Tàpies together, provides another perspective on Hotere’s literary sensibility. Hotere’s use of text has been named meditative in the recitative sense: as prayers or songs of grief or waiata, that calls for the viewer to participate or witness. Consideration of the materiality of poetry, in the sense Valente and Tàpies proffer, suggests a way of reading the relation between the spiritual and material in Hotere’s work within the contemplative mode. It is improbable that Hotere would have maintained an elaborate metaphysical system or spiritual programme within his notion of contemplation. His reticence required that the task be left with his viewers. Yet his interest in the physics of light within his explorations in black provide one way of accessing a material poetry. In Hotere’s *Black Paintings* of 1968 thin lines of the spectrum of light within each series of seven works reveal this concern. His use of black here takes on an almost purely material outworking as the artist becomes scientist.

The indexical quality of a painting can also be described in simple terms: as the viewer’s embodied reception of the work. Artist and theorist Barbara Bolt provides a way of explaining this via the indexical quality of paint. Against the assumption that there is a gap between the sign and its referent, and towards the notion that an artwork might perform rather than represent, she asks if there could be a causal link or “dynamic relationship” between the image and matter – material effects that are also bound up

¹⁷⁸ José Ángel Valente, *Poesía y prosa. Obras Completas I*, ed. Andrés Sánchez Robayna (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, Círculo de Lectores, 2006), 399, cited in Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero, “‘The first stage of the creative process in the work of wallace stevens and josé ángel valente: ‘Notes on a Supreme Fiction’ and ‘Cinco fragmentos para antoni tàpies,’” *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, 16 (Seville, 2012): 116.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

with the contextual situations of the art work, or the mode of artistic production.¹⁸⁰

Hotere's works provide an embodied experience for the viewer regardless of the content, and in this sense the contemplative mode is inherently bound up with bodily experience.

Conclusions

Reinhardt, Klein and Tàpies each developed accompanying philosophical texts for their respective practices, presenting specific metaphysical intentions for their work. Hotere on the other hand, provided no such explanatory remarks, as his critics and art-historians reiterate. Reading Hotere alongside these three moderns, however, sheds light on the little he did state: it places emphasis on aesthetic contemplation or meditation as the site of potential becoming. This interpretive stance defines his works within a tradition of aesthetics that has clear implications for theological analysis.

Reading Reinhardt alongside Hotere was an obvious move, covering well-trodden ground. But here it serves to confirm a few points of departure for a more thoroughgoing theological consideration. First, I began with a close reading of Reinhardt's and Hotere's painting style and noted similarities and dissimilarities between them. One can refer to Francis Pound for a fuller analysis. I focused on the notion of immateriality as a correlating notion with transcendence, expressed first in Reinhardt though his preference for a matt finish to the surface of his paintings. Achieved through brushing out the brush, Hotere made the same move. While he did work with a matt finish, his reflective gloss surfaces achieve the same ends. His surfaces are sometimes buffed to produce a reflective swirling sheen. As Pound pointed out: "Nothing in paint could be more immaterial than these vanishing swirls that find their being only in the state of a perpetual disappearance into dark."¹⁸¹ So on one hand, the analogy can function through the quality of either surface. On the other hand, Hotere breaks with modernist rule to permit an alternative reading to Reinhardt's metaphysical strictures, as the viewer sees themselves within the work. Both artists present the viewer

¹⁸⁰ Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 168-69; 173.

¹⁸¹ Pound, "Tiger Country: Hotere, Reinhardt and the US Masters," 25.

with the possibility of a phenomenological encounter that asks the viewers to confront themselves: Reinhardt's art world apophaticism is an entirely inward affair, void of the literary tradition that defines mystical theology. Hotere's works are more literal, and his sensibility on the whole is also more literary. For Reinhardt, the spiritual content in his work is bracketed outside of religious tradition. Hotere stated nothing explicit about religion yet his work provides the viewer with a clear religious sensibility through the use of symbolism, which Reinhardt largely omitted.

Reinhardt's friend Thomas Merton considers his art as religious. Art world apophaticism is returned to the realm of religion through Merton's appropriation that places the work outside of the art world context as a religious practice. It is through Merton that an Eastern spirituality meets a Western context, as ahistorical and orientalist as it is. The main point here is the clear implication of the art work as a form of religious contemplation, as Munroe describes it, "as a specific focus of contemplation and perceptual experience aimed at transforming consciousness."¹⁸² Hotere's and Reinhardt's work function analogously for spiritual experience, inside or outside of a religious context, depending on the viewer.

The confluence of Eastern and Western thought in modern art presents two distinct metaphysical systems. The void is considered as a notion of potentiality and the non-dualism of Buddhism sits in contrast to the neo-platonic tendency of the Western system. Aesthetic tradition informs the conception of the abstract monochrome as a mystical vision that has telos. Taylor's *aphaeresis*, positions Reinhardt's form of apophaticism in a more specific light, better suited perhaps, for the painterly process of abstraction as eliciting a "stripping away" logic.¹⁸³ But the notion that the apophaticism of black painting has presence rather than absence is supported not only by the physical and material properties of the colour itself, as "the *total presence* of light"¹⁸⁴ but of the viewer's physical encounter with the work. My viewing of Reinhardt's work was an embodied experience that had the opposite sensation of emptiness or absence. Hotere's dancing surfaces elicit the same response. The viewer is confronted with themselves.

¹⁸² Munroe, "Art of Perceptual Experience," n.p.

¹⁸³ Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 86

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

But with Hotere, this sense is multiflorous. Associations spiral outwards in a way that disrupts the single and singular directional vision of union with an Absolute reality. Here the mechanics of aesthetic contemplation are central. The particularities of the artists' articulations define the analogy in altering ways, which in turn alters the metaphysical interpretation of the work. The potential contribution of a theological aesthetics becomes clear: Hotere's admission of 'meditation' meets Merton's endorsement of 'meditation.' I also note the roots of the abstract monochrome in Romanticism, which supports the standing of the notion of aesthetic contemplation.

An initial interpretive point of departure between Hotere and Klein is their shared approach to weathering materials and use of natural elements: fire for example. Another shared connection is their respective associations with Roman Catholicism. An artistic appreciation and interpretation of the sacramental principle has been interpreted as an underpinning concept in Klein's work. This principle is not directly associated with Hotere's work, but Klein provides an example of how the monochrome can be interpreted through this paradigm.

Like Reinhardt, Klein is indebted to the Hegelian train of metaphysics. Yet he differentiates himself from Reinhardt, arguing instead for the notion of presence in a kataphatic sense. In simple terms, he rejects the hocus-pocus of mystical texts and traditions, while also admitting a familiarity with some of these traditions. In a sense he attempts something more orthodox with this admission. Yet his philosophical writings maintain a specific metaphysical agenda, which Reinhardt resists and about which Hotere is reticent.

Klein's interpretation of the notion of grace provides another reading to place alongside Hotere. He argues that grace should be shared, which according to Ottmann, provides an implicit soteriological analogy and which is ultimately utopian. Here also, icon logic provides a theoretical underpinning. Klein's sacramental edifice is idiosyncratic, and it is disturbingly misogynistic from a feminist perspective.

The sense of an embodied apophaticism, or pure kataphaticism, emerges in an interpretation of Klein's work. He draws upon the materiality of the universe to

delineate this sensibility. His position is also phenomenologically grounded in a poetics of materiality following Bachelard. He sought the notion of the 'indefinable' as the soul or psyche of his work. This notion is ontologically embedded in the way colour 'is.' Here again the art object is explicitly considered as a device for contemplation. In his writing he is at pains to encourage the viewer's total engagement with his work – as a total embodiment or 'impregnation' of colour.

Klein's philosophical framework is also neo-platonic. He presents a strict hierarchy of colour. His use of gold leaf was an early discovery on his way to conceptualising a fuller philosophy. In gold he was said to have discovered the 'illumination of matter.' Hotere's use of gold leaf may likewise be considered as illuminated matter (presence) in the kataphatic sense.

In overview, Klein highlights the way an artist's particularity defines their metaphysics. Theological analysis is thus shaped by the artist's work and practice. The initial departure point for reading Hotere alongside Tàpies, involved their shared use of everyday materials. A shared connection to aesthetic contemplation is also prominent. Tàpies positioned himself outside of a religious context, yet with Hotere religious content floats as cyphers within the surfaces of his work. Tàpies's works fit within the broader interpretive framework of the abstract monochrome: he sought to guide his viewers towards connecting with ultimate reality in the neo-platonic sense.

Tàpies also presents an elaborate idiosyncratic systematics for his metaphysical notions. Yet the particularities of his work are differentiated from Klein's and Reinhardt's, in that matter has a more prominent position within his philosophical schema. Interpreting the connection between the material and spiritual through the indexical sign, also naturally encompasses a broader setting: painting itself can be indexical, and a comparison can be made with Hotere in this way. The literary sensibility in Tàpies work is another point of comparison with Hotere. With an emphasis on the materiality of their respective literary sensibilities within a contemplative mode, the interpretive framework differs again from Reinhardt and Klein. In addition to Hotere's use of found materials, his interest in the physics of light place emphasis on the material quality of his work.

Each artist in conversation here elicits an embodied meditative response from his viewers. The main conclusion drawn from these comparative readings, is the centrality of the notion of aesthetic contemplation. It is here that a theological interpretation gains traction, bound up with the tradition of aesthetics proper.

The metaphysical underpinning of the tradition of the abstract monochrome is inherently neo-platonic. McEvelley provides an art historical text, reviewing the stylistic differences of the metaphysical and ideological positions of avant-garde artists whose choice of activity was abstract monochrome painting. He cites Plotinus, the founder of Neo-Platonism, towards a working definition of the metaphysical underpinning of the modernist monochrome that maintains an “intuition of Oneness behind the appearance of the Many...”¹⁸⁵ This “One –Many” theme was a prevalent concern within the visual arts that began in the early 18th Century through the notion of the sublime, which is reflected in the metaphysics of the abstract monochrome. McEvelley explains that this notion is upheld by the figure–ground relationship within the art work. Monochromes, he explains, eradicate this figure ground relationship. The surface of the work or the “ground alone” “asserts the primacy of the One,” and “[this] assertion is characteristic of the tradition of the sublime.”¹⁸⁶ The modernist monochrome had the notion of unity as its ultimate goal.

Klein, Reinhardt and Tàpies constitute a nexus of influence for Hotere – especially the Eastern and Western forms of mysticism located within the historical and cultural bedrock of Hotere’s international context. Yet Hotere’s work, while in association with a particular geographical and cultural and religious milieu, presents an alternative picture to that of the metaphysical lineage represented by these modern abstract painters. The way in which the inflections of these metaphysical influences shifted within discourses of criticism over time also has a bearing on the interpretation of his work. The genealogy of black that Baker identified, carries with it a raft of associations embedded within the histories of modernism that retrospectively reference the lineage of Romanticism. In the heyday of the abstract monochrome, the relationship between

¹⁸⁵ McEvelley, “Seeking the Primal Through Paint,” 46.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

the metaphysical dimensions and intentions of this form of painting was expressed in earnest. By the 1970s however, the Romantic ideological and spiritual vision of escaping the entrapments of material existence had somewhat shifted. Hotere's embrace of ordinary materials contextualises a spirituality that affirms the everyday. His use of Catholic liturgical symbolism emphasises the Western religious tradition of mysticism and lifts him out of the modernist void. The presence of text in Hotere's work, also places his work in relation to traditions of mysticism that embrace textuality and are inherently formed by their respective relationships with poetic language. Lastly, the Māori genealogical *soul* of Hotere's work shifts the contours of interpretation significantly.

Hotere's embedded political concerns and collaborative endeavours with poets also assist in repositioning the notion of a spiritual vision that maintains the notion of art as an object of aesthetic contemplation. Before examining the cosmo-genealogical narratives that inform Māori notions of spirituality, I will briefly consider Hotere as a potential post-modernist through his collaborative endeavours with poets, and as a progressive modernist, through consideration of his political anti-colonial statements.

CHAPTER FIVE

Aotearoa New Zealand: Hotere's Māori heritage

In this chapter I consider Hotere's work within the postcolonial context of New Zealand and give specific attention to his use of language. I then consider Hotere's heritage as Māori, before exploring the implicit cosmo-genealogical narratives that contribute to the spiritual interpretation of his work. A Māori worldview proffers a relationally defined ontological paradigm of being in the world. This aspect of reading Hotere will support a wider theological paradigm in the ensuing conclusion.

Language: heritage and poetry

Hotere's use of text in his painting intersects the various interpretations I have considered so far. Recalling previous chapters, his use of text supports a literary interpretation of the mystical tradition. There is also a material indexical quality to the poetry in his work that supports an embodied and interconnected definition of spirituality within his work. This is evident when his work is considered in conjunction with the work of Tàpies. But it is especially salient if one reads his works as a form of *moteatea*¹ as Ngahiraka Mason shows.

Hotere's choice of texts in his work often reflects his Roman Catholic and Māori heritage – at times both. For example, his work *Requiem for Tony* (1974, ref. 34, fig. 6) contains both Māori and English translations of one of the Psalms.² Hotere's spiritual sensibility can be traced to his upbringing in the far North of Aotearoa New Zealand. Wedde suggests these combinations of traditions and predilections would have come naturally to Hotere:

¹ Moteatea “3. (noun) lament, traditional chant, sung poetry - a general term for songs sung in traditional mode.” *Māori Dictionary*
<http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=moteatea> (Accessed 20 September 2018).

² See Baker's account of this work: Baker, 'Hotere's *Requiem* and the Psalms' in “A World of Black and Light,” 192-202. “I TE TAKIRITANGA O TE ATA, TAE NOA KI TE POURITANGA O TE PO” is written on the front of the painting, and “Psalms, From the dawn, of the morning, to the darkness, of the night...” is inscribed on the back of the painting. Baker locates Hotere's notes that indicate the Māori text in this work is a fragment from Psalm 129. But the translations and content of the psalm do not correspond. She locates possible texts in Psalm 113 and Psalm 139, and considers the idea that Hotere transcribed this text from memory.

[Hotere] was brought up and educated in a tri-lingual culture – Māori, English and Latin. His father, Tangirau, was a noted poet. Ralph himself was well versed in the poetic traditions of Ngati Ruanui and Te Aupouri, and could quote at length from memory. The place he grew up in was in the vicinity of old, buried treasures. Baptised Hone Papita Hotere by the successors of Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pompellier, the French Society of Mary missionary who came to the Hokianga in the 1830s, his name was both a reference to John the Baptist (described by Pa Tate as ‘a stirrer’) and to the French bishop. I got the impression his French was okay and he read poetry in it, and in Spanish.³

Hotere was naturally endowed to contribute to the literary character of twentieth century visual art in Aotearoa New Zealand. In addition, Hotere’s contribution to postcolonial discourse through his work is salient. Wedde and Gregory Burke suggest that the use of language by Māori artists in visual art reflects a postcolonial paradigm. Noting the “singular history” of the “involvement of language in art” in New Zealand, Wedde writes,

[the] involvement of Māori artists in this context indicates another dimension: the effects of imprinting one language upon another; of imprinting a colonising language upon a land already made particular in another language; of the encounter of one language with another indigenous one whose relationship with its own art was seamless.⁴

Hotere worked with multiple languages – Māori, English, Latin, French, Spanish and Italian – and made connections with different cultures which were variously embedded in his work at different times. So the picture is a little more complex for Hotere. European modernism meets Māori literature and, in this meeting, Hotere’s works function as ‘objects for meditation.’ However, as Mane-Wheoki states, “Hotere’s work

³ Wedde, “O Salutaris,” n.p.

⁴ Ian Wedde, “Introduction,” in *Now See Hear!: Art, Language, and Translation* ed. Ian Wedde and Gregory Burke (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990), 10.

often perplexes Māori.”⁵ Mane-Wheoki cites a conversation he had with Sir John Bennett, who was not convinced by Hotere’s art.⁶

Moteatea

Others like Ngahiraka Mason, however, are enriched by Hotere’s work. She makes a connection between the Māori poetry in Hotere’s work and the oral literature and practice of moteatea. Through reading, or reciting, a Hotere work that contains Māori text, the work itself becomes a form of moteatea, enabling the reader to “[make] associations with people and places...”⁷

When I see Hotere paintings that have moteatea, I like to read them aloud or hear them spoken....the visuals and the words compete for my attention... In seeing [Hotere’s Black Paintings’] (the ones that contain moteatea), I make a connection to the references for blackness in moteatea, for example: *te po uriuri*, the extreme dark; *te po tangotango*, the impenetrable night; *te po oti atu*, that to which we are all destined. It is then apparent to me that in these paintings, the literal use of black, along with metaphorical references to blackness, is related to the tradition of moteatea. It could be said that the use of black by Hotere is his *painterly* expression of moteatea.⁸

Hotere’s engagement with poetry in his work is also decidedly collaborative. John Bevan Ford draws out a conceptual reading of Hotere’s work through the collaborative undertakings that were a defining feature of his practice. He notes the way Hotere made texts the “starting points” of his work, revealing a “close relationship between artefact, and language.”⁹ Referring to Hotere’s working relationship with the poet Hone Tuwhare he declares: “...Hone’s work is the material of Ralph’s life,” to make the point that language, as the “starting point” contributes to the artwork as a “[resolution] of the

⁵ Mane-Wheoki “Out on His Own: Ralph Hotere and the Māori Art Movement,” in *Hotere: Seminar Papers*, 51.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ngahiraka Mason, “Hotere and Moteatea Hei Korero,” in *Hotere: Seminar Papers*, 60.

⁸ Mason, “Hotere and Moteatea Hei Korero,” 60.

⁹ John Bevan Ford, “E koe ano!,” in *Now See Hear!: Art, Language, and Translation*, ed. Ian Wedde and Gregory Burke (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990), 119.

material of...living.”¹⁰ The *No Ordinary Sun* (see 1984, ref. 35) series is a good example, in which Hotere works with Tuwhare’s poem of the same name.

Hotere’s collaborative endeavours disrupt the notion of the modern artist as a singular genius. Charles Ninow also supports this view. Writing on Hotere’s work *Dawn/Water Poem* (1975, ref. 36) and the characteristic of his collaborative relationship with Bill Manhire, Ninow refers to this work as representative of a juncture in Hotere’s “evolution from a modernist painter to a postmodern practitioner who programmed external sources of information rather than drew stimulus from within himself.”¹¹ In *Dawn/Water Poem*, Hotere quotes Manhire directly, citing the title and author within the painting itself. O’Brien, in conversation with Manhire, reflects upon the postmodern character of this artistic tactic: “Hotere’s use of stencils and wooden printing blocks and his avoidance of the ‘heroic’ brushstroke make the works quieter and more self regarding, postmodern in their detachment, you could say.”¹² Manhire himself elaborates on Hotere’s collaborative process through considering the way Hotere employs his work in the sense of ready-to-hand material and “part of the process of making a thing, rather than having it all flow from the mind and soul of the ‘genius’ who’s producing the ‘master work’.”¹³ Hotere reveals postmodern tendencies in his collaborative approach. Yet he cannot be confined within a single context, as Wedde has pointed out with reference to the “gap” in critical reception of Hotere’s work as critics face a “contradictory co-presence in Ralph’s work of austere understatement and rich content.”¹⁴ The hermeneutical task of reading Hotere unearths a rich network of associations.

¹⁰ Ford, “E koe ano!,” 119.

¹¹ Charles Ninow, “Ralph Hotere: *Dawn/ Water Poem*, Manhire,” in *Important Paintings & Contemporary Art: Catalogue 327* (Auckland: Webb’s, Aug 2011), 77. *Issuu*, https://issuu.com/webbs_house/docs/full_cat_med_res (accessed 6 November, 2018).

¹² Gregory O’Brien, “Some Paintings I am Frequently Asked About: Talking with Bill Manhire about Ralph Hotere,” in Bill Manhire, *Doubtful Sounds: Essays and Interviews* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2000), 61.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Wedde, “O Salutaris,” n.p.

An indigenous modernism

Hotere's work manifests an astute awareness of global politics and postcolonialism. Unambiguous political and environmental activist statements are direct interpretations of the multi-lingual, and collaborative participatory relations between sets of languages and cultures in his work. His position within late modernism is also conditioned by these concerns, which in turn alters a reading of the metaphysical schematics of the inward contemplative abstract monochrome.

Damian Skinner positions Hotere within a decolonial context in association with the 'New Commonwealth Internationalism' movement. He draws on Hotere's integrated political gestures as a good example, "[illustrating] the possibilities of indigenous modernism...as a decolonising process within settler societies,"¹⁵ while seeking to "challenge our understanding of modernism, decolonisation and New Commonwealth Internationalism in this period."¹⁶ Skinner considers Hotere within the context of an "art history of alternative modernisms" and as a corrective to a confined view of modernism that does not "properly identify indigenous appropriations of modernist artistic strategies as tactics of liberation."¹⁷ A concise summation of this tactic can be found in Skinner's citation of Oli Oguibe's reference to "a humanist sensibility ... that sought meaning not in pure abstractions or the formal sources of the period, but in beliefs, knowledge, and forms from older cultures..."¹⁸ As Skinner puts it, this sensibility "was reinserted into formalist modernism, fed by anti-colonial awareness and an alliance to the processes of decolonisation happening internationally."¹⁹

Referring to Hotere's *Human Rights* (from 1964, ref. 37, fig. 7) series, Skinner also reads this anti-colonial consciousness in the modernist formalism that Hotere employed through the influence of Reinhardt. He aligns the political consciousness and "anti-colonial struggles" in Hotere's work with a "modern consciousness" of progress, as a

¹⁵ Damian Skinner, "Humanist modernism: Ralph Hotere and 'New Commonwealth Internationalism'" in *Cultures of decolonisation: Transnational productions and practices, 1945–70*, ed. Ruth Craggs and Claire Wintle (Manchester University Press, 2016), 52.

¹⁶ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷ Ibid., 64.

¹⁸ Olu Oguibe, "'Footprints of a Mountaineer': Uzo Egonu and Black Redefinition of Modernism," in Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 68, in Ibid., 54.

¹⁹ Skinner, "Humanist modernism," 54.

form of “appropriation” of “rebellion and revolt inherent in the avant-garde.”²⁰ He also notes a comparison between modern indigenous artworks and the “autonomous” characteristic of the modern art work, in the way these works are positioned outside of traditional indigenous contexts.²¹ Skinner defines this “artistic decolonisation” in reference to Leon Wainwright’s argument that views indigenous modern art as a subversive and liberating tactic: for, “being ‘modern’ was an inaccessible status since they were aiming to insinuate themselves in a ‘place’ or ‘position’ predicated on their exclusion.”²² Hotere’s refusal to label himself a Māori artist, (“I am Māori by birth and upbringing. As far as my work is concerned this is coincidental”²³), suggests he was aware of the tensions, and his work clearly holds up as a successful contribution to postcolonial discourse.

Hotere’s Māori cultural heritage

Reading Hotere could be described as working through a multifaceted prism of interpretive emphases, rather than arriving at definitive conclusions. The interconnectedness of the various facets of interpretation provide a rich set of negotiating criteria. Perhaps the interpretive gaps provide opportunity rather than confliction. Rangihira Panoho identifies one of these gaps, suggesting the recitation of Hotere’s dictum (“I am Māori by birth and upbringing. As far as my work is concerned this is coincidental”) as a possible cause for the way critics have addressed Hotere’s relationship with modern art. Panoho writes from a position that acknowledges a Māori worldview that affirms a “circuitous” vision, where the contextualisation of Hotere’s oeuvre is not subsumed by the influences of his modernist whakapapa, but “makes

²⁰ R. Araeen, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989), 12, cited in Ibid.

²¹ Skinner, “Humanist modernism,” 53.

²² L. Wainwright, “Francis Newton Souza and Aubrey Williams: Entwined Art Histories at the End of Empire,” in *Visual Culture and Decolonisation in Britain*, ed. Simon Faulkner and Anandi Ramamurthy (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), 105, in Skinner “Humanist modernism,” 64.

²³ Takitaki Frank Davis, “Maori art and artists,” *Education 9* (Wellington: School Publications, 1976), 29, cited in Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, “Contemporary Māori art – ngā toi hōu - Contemporary or customary Māori art,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/contemporary-maori-art-nga-toi-hou/page-2> (accessed 20 September 2018).

sense” of it, from within his Māori cultural heritage:²⁴ “Everything comes back to it...like the kūaka (godwit) journeying north cyclically, he returns. No matter where he travels he ‘...upholds the *mana*²⁵ of our art for us globally.’”²⁶

Hotere’s works, *Black Phoenix* (1984–88, ref. 38, fig. 8) and *Godwit/Kuaka* (1977, see fig. 2) are Panoho’s primary textual interlocutors. These works, he argues, anchor Hotere’s artistic vision within his cultural heritage. Panoho reminds his readers that the *kūaka* has an iconographical link with the geographical and historical lineages of Te Aupōuri, Hotere’s iwi.²⁷ He refers to Hotere’s recitation of the *kūaka waiata*²⁸ at the end of Merata Mita’s feature film, *Hotere* (2001) and asks the reader to consider a participatory position through chanting the words in order to “find enchantment in their rhythm,” and “[enjoy] the originary associations.”²⁹ At this point, Panoho entreats the reader to participate in the text:

Ruia, ruia, tahia, tahia,
Kia hemo atu te kākoa
Kia herea mai ki te kawao koroki
E tātaki mai ana
I roto i tana pūkorokoro whaikoro.
He kūaka mārangaranga

²⁴ Rangihiroa Panoho, *Māori Art: History, Architecture, Landscape and Theory* (Auckland, New Zealand: David Bateman, 2015), 97.

²⁵ Mana: 2. (noun) prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma - mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object. Mana goes hand in hand with tapu, one affecting the other. *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=mana> (Accessed 20 September 2018).

²⁶ Panoho refers to Paratene Matchitt’s comment. Personal correspondence with Panoho, Matchitt, Ōtatarā Arts Centre, Napier, 1987, in Panoho, *Māori Art*, 120.

²⁷ Iwi: “1. (noun) extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race - often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory.” *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=iwi> (Accessed 20 September 2018).

²⁸ Waiata “2. (noun) song, chant, psalm.” *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=waiata> (Accessed 20 September 2018).

²⁹ Panoho, *Māori Art*, 116.

Kotahi mana tāu ki te tāhuna

Tāu atu, tāu atu, kua tāu mai

Scatter, scatter, sweep on, sweep on

To pass along on the hard fibres

To be bound to the chatter of the shag

Which is caught inside his protected hollow

There the restless godwits

One bird has landed on the sandbank

it has come to land, it has come to land,

it has landed.³⁰

The Māori quality of Hotere's work is identified, by Panoho, as an "intangible dimension"³¹ at the outset – as a "language of shadow and metaphor."³² Panoho provides an outline of an inherent wairua (spirit, soul, mood, feel, essence)³³ in Hotere's art. One of the significant locations of this wairuatanga (spirituality),³⁴ resides in Hotere's environmentally focussed works. Panoho identifies the notion of guardianship as a defining feature of Māori relationship with the natural world, and the "whānaungatanga interconnectedness"³⁵ between the natural world and human beings.³⁶

³⁰ Ibid., 109. Panoho acknowledges access to a family manuscript Reverend Ihaka Eru Ihaka, "Ngā Kōrero mō Te Aupōuri," June 1986.

³¹ Panoho, *Māori Art*, 100.

³² Ibid., 101.

³³ Wairua: "1. (noun) spirit, soul - spirit of a person which exists beyond death. It is the non-physical spirit, distinct from the body and the mauri. To some, the wairua resides in the heart or mind of someone while others believe it is part of the whole person and is not located at any particular part of the body...Some believe that all animate and inanimate things have a whakapapa and a wairua.

2. (noun) attitude, quintessence, feel, mood, feeling, nature, essence, atmosphere." *Māori Dictionary*, [http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=wairua+\(Assessed 20 September 2018\)](http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=wairua+(Assessed+20+September+2018).).

³⁴ Wairuatanga: "spirituality," *Māori Dictionary*, [http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=wairuatanga+\(Accessed 20 September 2018\)](http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=wairuatanga+(Accessed+20+September+2018).).

³⁵ Whānaungatanga "1. (noun) relationship, kinship, sense of family connection - a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging. It develops as a result of kinship rights and obligations, which also serve to strengthen each member of the kin group. It also extends to others to whom one develops a close familial, friendship or reciprocal relationship." *Māori Dictionary*,

[http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=wh%C4%81naungatanga \(Accessed 20 September 2018\)](http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=wh%C4%81naungatanga+(Accessed+20+September+2018).).

³⁶ Panoho, *Māori Art*, 102.

This discussion has intentionally sifted through a series of interpretive perspectives, not only to exemplify the way reading Hotere is decidedly multifaceted, but to present a picture of the way each component of his work supports another. Wedde's argument defines the critical discourse on Hotere as vaguely problematic, essentially pointing to the fact that interpretively, he cannot be pinned down. Yet the benefit of tracing an interpretive emphasis to its depths, also adds to the richness of the wider interpretive encounter. Here I linger with Panoho's reading of Māori spirituality in Hotere's work in order to consider a fuller picture of the cosmo-genealogical spiritual paradigm at a more abstract level.

Māori notions of darkness within a cosmo-genealogical paradigm

Panoho considers the notion of darkness in Hotere's work from a Māori perspective, and begins with Hotere's iwi, Te Aupōuri. The cultural narrative associated with this iwi from which part of their name derives, refers to a 'dark smoke,' that provided cover so that Hotere's ancestors could escape the confines of a siege.³⁷ Baker also examines the meaning of black in the context of Hotere's tribe Te Aupōuri where part of the name (pōuri) itself carries the meaning of darkness, or sorrow.³⁸ She recites the narratives that pertain to the history of Te Aupōuri, which is derived from the imagery of black water in an event of tribal conflict: "'because of the au [current] of that river being dark (pourī) with the combined smoke and ash of our pa and our dead.'" ³⁹ In 1999 Hotere's work *Black Phoenix* was included in the Te Papa Tongarewa exhibition *Te Aupouri Iwi: People of Smoke and Flame*. Baker comments: "As the mythical Phoenix emerges from the ashes of the fire, and Hotere's *Black Phoenix* arises out of the burnt remains of a Carey's Bay fishing boat, so too did Te Aupōuri create new life for their tribe by

³⁷ Panoho elaborates: "*Te au pōuri*, 'the dark smoke' was the result of a deliberately iconoclastic action. Under the instructions of their Ngāti Ruanui leaders, Te Ikanui and Whēru, people were required to burn all that they held valuable. The obscuring cloud signified the destruction of Ngāti Ruanui as a living, tangible identity. Loss of *taonga* 'artworks', treasures, and houses at Makora pā, along with the burning of the sedge grasses of their dunes at Pawarenga, is crucial. It enables their movement, undetected, across the harbour waters. Escape, in turn, encourages a new identity..." Panoho, *Māori Art*, 102-103.

³⁸ Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 227.

³⁹ Matire Kereama, (Matire Hoefi), *The Tail of the Fish: Māori memories of the Far North* (Auckland: published privately by Oswald-Sealy, 1968), 8, cited in Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 229. Au: "1. (noun) smoke. 2. (noun) cloud, mist, fog. 3. (noun) current." *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=au> (Accessed 20 September 2018).

escaping under cover of the black smoke and flame of their burning pa at Makora.”⁴⁰ Hotere consistently returned to the imagery of fire, smoke and blackness in his work, thus maintaining a hermeneutical connection with his ancestral narrative.

The notion of blackness also has broader cosmo-genealogical implications within a Māori worldview. Panoho addresses the “fecundity” of darkness, citing Albert Wendt’s assertion of the presence of this potentiality in Hotere’s work.⁴¹ Panoho goes on to unpack this notion in relation to “[the] seemingly formless nature of black in *kōwhaiwhai*...”⁴² noting that “black” within the context of Māori cosmological thought, engenders a binary logic – it “causes one to think of its opposite.”⁴³ The relationship between the shapes and the spaces in *kōwhaiwhai* designs are understood as interconnected or symbiotic.⁴⁴ This reading is confirmed by Ford, who links Hotere’s work with a broader epistemological and metaphysical paradigm that is defined through the notion of *whakapapa*:

Te kore, the nothing – but the nothing is called te kore, the ‘te’, the definite article, has the implication that there is the nothing and therefore the not-the-nothing. So you have that two-way thing right at the beginning. Look at work like Ralph Hotere’s and you see this duality is basic to his underlying structures.... we see the underlying concepts of the nothing and the not-the-nothing, of light and dark, of commemoration, of coming and going, of responsibility toward land, responsibility toward one another. And that’s what makes his work Māori. It is not that he is using lots of korus, but it is absolutely

⁴⁰ Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 233.

⁴¹ Panoho elaborates: “Fecundity in Māori cosmology is present in the blackness. Within these narratives, involving *te kore* ‘the nothingness’ and *te pō* ‘the night,’ black is the enmeshing, all surrounding, ever-present, fertile embryonic darkness, with endless possibilities and stages of being or non-being. This helps account for the fact that some feel that while Hotere seems, in his work, to be going away or distancing himself from obvious indigenous cultural form or content, the opposite may, in fact, be the case.” Panoho, *Māori Art*, 115.

⁴² *Kōwhaiwhai*, “2. (noun) painted scroll ornamentation - commonly used on meeting house rafters.” *Māori Dictionary*,

<http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=k%C5%8Dwhaiwhai> (Accessed 20 September 2018).

⁴³ Panoho, *Māori Art*, 115.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Māori thought.... What is Māori art? ... ‘Oh that’s easy, it is just the materialisation of Māori thought!’⁴⁵

Kōwhaiwha as a visual representation for genealogical recital, directs the interpretation of Hotere’s black, as an interconnected notion within a grander cosmo-genealogical paradigm. Hotere’s black, might be one side of a duality, yet it is intimately connected to the whole. The “intangible” Māoriness of Hotere’s work is expressed by Panoho in reference to “what comprises substance in the duality he consistently presents,”⁴⁶ within the “silence” of the “blackness of the negative form.”⁴⁷ The “fecundity” of the darkness of Te Pō is also referenced in connection with the natural environment: “In *Kūaka* and [Hotere’s] wider body of work...fecundity emerges from the natural environment itself,” Panoho states. He identifies this generative presence “between the lines of the *kūaka* chant and the materiality of the mural...”⁴⁸

Te Pō: the realm of darkness and becoming

As Te Pō relates to the creation of the cosmos, it is also associated with death. Baker addresses the notion of Te Pō which translates as black or darkness, forming part of Māori creation mythology, as well as a transitional place where souls pass through beyond death. The inherent relationship between light and darkness, or light that comes out of darkness is the thematic focus of Baker’s thesis. She highlights the relation between light and darkness as a fundamental cultural notion, and intimately connected to Māori thought and language.⁴⁹ Baker cites Elsdon Best’s description:

The underworld, or Hades, to which the spirits of the dead descend, is termed the “po,” a word which also means “night.” Pouri = dark; uri denotes blackness or very dark colour . . . “po” is a term often used as a synonym for death. In like manner the expression “ao marama” (light world, or world light) is employed to denote life, the world of life, this world we live in.

⁴⁵ Ford, “E koe ano!,” 112–113.

⁴⁶ Panoho, *Māori Art*, 116.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁹ See Mervyn McLean and Margaret Orbell, *Traditional Songs of the Māori* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1975), 28, cited in Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 222.

Hence “light” and “life” are, to the Māori, equal terms, as are “darkness” and “death”.⁵⁰

Accounts of creation mythology and a notion of the afterlife draw from the same genealogical paradigm. Baker follows Cleve Barlow’s account of the afterlife: “When a person dies they initially enter a world that is black, Te Po. ‘At death’, Barlow writes, ‘a person’s spirit leaps from Reinga into a world of darkness and ventures from there into the spirit world.’”⁵¹ The spirit travels through Te Pō, through the transitional place called the wheiao⁵² on their way to Te Ao Mārama.⁵³ Baker draws a correlation between the swirls of reflected light that are a characteristic feature in Hotere’s black lacquered works, and the swirling form of kelp in water that can be found within Māori narratives of the spirit’s departure to the afterlife through the water at Cape Reinga at low tide.⁵⁴ She locates a series of motifs and themes in Hotere’s work that reflect traditional Māori views on death:

...laments and waiata tangi [song of mourning] of Māori poetry; the finely inscribed circles with the accompanying notion of eternal cycles of life and death; and the sequence of lines like tautly stretched chords that shimmer and

⁵⁰ Elsdon Best, *Māori Eschatology* (Facsimile edition), (Christchurch: Kiwi Publishers, c.1998), 8-9 in Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 227.

⁵¹ Cleve Barlow, *Tikanga Whakaaro: Key concepts in Māori culture* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), 94, cited in Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 222.

⁵² Wheiao: “(noun) daylight, world of light - a word usually coupled with *ao mārāma*... The wheiao is the place between the world of darkness and the world of light, but it is closer to the unfolding of the world of light. The first wheiao occurred at the time that Ranginui and Papatūānuku and their children lived together.” *Māori Dictionary*, <http://Māoridictionary.co.nz/word/10240> (24 October 16)

⁵³ Ao Mārama, 1. (noun) world of life and light, Earth, physical world. *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=Ao+Marama> (24 October 2017).

⁵⁴ Baker cites Cilla McQueen: “This language of light refers to and extends an earlier language, developing in the black lacquer works since the late 1960s, of light moving within and beyond an immaculate surface in the way that wreaths of kelp swirl and rock in the tide.” Cilla McQueen, *Ralph Hotere Black Light: Major Works Including Collaborations with Bill Culbert*, 42, in Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 233. Baker writes, “According to Māori belief when a person dies the spirit leaves the body and travels north along the west coast past Te Oneroa-a-Tohe/Ninety Mile Beach to Te Rerenga Wairua/Cape Reinga (the leaping place of the spirits). It is here they wait at the kahika tree for the outgoing tide before they ‘take their final plunge into the water, at the mouth of an underground cave, Te Pokatarere, and then leave for Hawaiki, the land of their ancestors.’” Dorothy Urlich Cloher, *The Tribes of Muriwhenua: Their Origins and Stories*, trans. by Merimeri Penfold (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2002), 37, cited in Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 233-234.

pulse and which in their imagined sound might be both shrill and mournful like the tangi.⁵⁵

As an example of these notions in Hotere's work, Baker identifies *Port Chalmers Painting*, (1971–72, ref. 39) which contains the inscription of a Māori poem (present in both English and Māori) from John White's *The Ancient History of the Māori*:

TENA TE PO KA WHIWHI	Darkness settles down
TENA TE PO KA TATAU	And nearer draws and deepens
TENA TE PO KIRA ATU	Yes, darkness now envelopes all
AUA TE NGARO	And hides from sight, and ancient
HE NGARO TAKI TAWHITO	Gods and priests are hid ⁵⁶

Unpacking the term Te Pō, along with Te Kore, in a little more detail will support an understanding of the spiritual nature of Hotere's use of black. Maori Marsden refers to a "three-world view," where Te Korekore, is "potential being;" Te Pō, is "the world of becoming;" and Te Ao Mārama, is "the world of being."⁵⁷ These realms are understood through cosmo-genealogical narratives and personification. Cosmo-genealogical analysis also provides a way to understand Māori notions of consciousness, and the relationship between spiritual and material reality within an interconnected relationally defined cosmology.

An iteration of the cosmo-genealogical narrative, following *The Lore of the Whare Wananga* (1913), Te Pō is expressed "as the dilemma faced by the offspring of Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatuanuku (the earth mother)" where the various recitations of Te Pō reflect the qualities and "adjectives that describe the intensity of the dilemma faced by the children of the primal parents."⁵⁸ Robert Hans George Jahnke

⁵⁵ Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 236.

⁵⁶ John White, *Ancient History of the Māori: his mythology and traditions* (Wellington: George Didsbury, Government Printer, 1887–90) cited in Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 223–224.

⁵⁷ Maori Marsden, *The Woven Universe: selected writings of Rev. Maori Marsden* (Otaki, N.Z.: Estate of Rev. Maori Marsden, 2003), 20.

⁵⁸ Robert Hans George Jahnke, "He Tataitanga Ahua Toi: The house that Riwai built/a continuum of Māori art," (PhD. Diss. Massey University, 2006), 59. See *The Lore of the Whare-wānanga*; or Teachings of the Maori College on Religion, Cosmology, and History. Written down by H.T. Whatahoro from

explains that the adjectives used to describe the various iterations of darkness within the process of becoming “fluctuate in intensity,” and are expressed by particular tribal narratives in various forms.⁵⁹ Importantly, Jahnke notes that Te Pō was not an entirely negative realm.

The realm of Te Pō represented as a series of intensities of darkness, can also be described as “a cyclical continuum (or more precisely, a spiral), which delineates the gradual emergence of light from darkness,” as Samuel K. Parker points out.⁶⁰ According to some narratives, these eras of Te Pō also relate the cycles of the moon. A metaphorical connection between the phases of the moon, as representative of cyclical daily life, is projected, “personified and magnified into great aeons of time.”⁶¹ Following the tohunga⁶² Te Matorohanga (1836-1865), the following six ages of Po encapsulate the light of a monthly lunar cycle:

Te Po-Taruitu (The Night with Light Faintly Seen)

Te Po-Whatuao (The Night with the Eye of Light)

Te Po-Atarau (The Night of Moonlight)

Te Po-Para-uriuri (The Night with Fragments of Darkness)

Te Po-Turu (The Night Confirmed)

Te Po-Whiro (The Night of Darkness before the New Moon)⁶³

Here I also think of Hotere’s work *February, May and the Birds of Ice. The Moon Drowns in its Voices of Water* (1970, ref. 40) in which the title is a Bill Manhire haiku, that was included in an exhibition entitled *Te Po Contemporary NZ artists* (11th May 2013 – 16th June 2013). But rather than an illustration of the diverse accounts of Te Pō,

teachings of Te Matorohanga and Nepia Pohuhu, priests of the Whare-wānanga of the East Coast, New Zealand, trans. by S. Percy Smith (New Plymouth, N.Z.: 1913), reduced to HTML by Christopher M. Weimer, February 2003, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pac/lww/lww00.htm> (26 November 2018).

⁵⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁰ Samuel K. Parker, “Dialectics of Power in the Māori Creation Myth,” *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (July 1987): 6.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Tohunga: “2. (noun) skilled person, chosen expert, priest, healer.” *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=tohunga> (Accessed 20 September 2018).

⁶³ Parker, “Dialectics of Power in the Māori Creation Myth,” 5.

the exhibition proposed an allegorical interpretation of the connection between a selection of artists from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery collection, with the aim of highlighting “a place where elemental qualities – genealogy, light and dark, materiality and text – are allowed to coalesce.”⁶⁴

Cosmo-interpretive spiralling

Reading cosmo-genealogical narratives through Hotere is reflected within the metaphor of the hermeneutical spiral itself. Referring to the cycles of the natural world, Makere Stewart-Harawira’s employment of the symbol of the double spiral from within Māori cosmology, as “a discursive and philosophical metaphor,” provides a useful hermeneutical point of reference.⁶⁵ This approach also supports Panoho’s reference to Hotere’s work as reflecting ‘black space’ in kōwhaiwhai tradition and interpretation. Stewart-Harawira argues that the double spiral represents an ontology of interrelatedness within the cosmic process, “of past, present and future, of time and space, of spirit and matter.”⁶⁶ He continues:

It represents *Te Korekore*, the world of raw elemental energy, pre-creation; *Te Po* the world of potentiality, of seeking, emerging and coming into being; and finally, *Te Ao Marama*, the emergence into light, into wisdom, into full beingness.⁶⁷

These realms maintain an understanding of the universe and history as an “on-going process.”⁶⁸ Maori Marsden describes Te Korekore, as “the realm between non-being and being: that is, the realm of potential being. This is the realm of primal, elemental energy or latent being.”⁶⁹ The realms of potential being, becoming, and being, as

⁶⁴ *Te Po Contemporary NZ artists* (11 May 2013 – 16 June 2013), Dunedin Public Art Gallery, http://dunedin.art.museum/exhibitions/featured/contemporary_nz_artists (accessed 09/07/2017).

⁶⁵ Makere Stewart-Harawira, “Returning the Sacred: Indigenous Ontologies in Perilous Times,” in *Radical Human Ecology: Intercultural and Indigenous Approaches*, ed. Lewis Williams, Rose Roberts, and Alastair McIntosh (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 74.

⁶⁶ Stewart-Harawira, *The New Imperial Order: Indigenous Responses to Globalization* (London: Zed Books; Palmerston North, New Zealand: Huia Books, 2005), 34, cited in *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁸ Marsden, *The Woven Universe*, 21.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

notions of a “continuous creation” are understood through allegories of growth: plant growth and human gestation.⁷⁰

Marsden is reluctant to translate Te Korekore as the ‘void’, given the assumptions this term has accrued within conceptual histories of modernism. He states, “Whilst [Te Korekore] does embrace ideas of emptiness and nothingness, this by no means exhausts its meaning.”⁷¹ Kore means ‘not,’ ‘negative,’ ‘nothing.’ Marsden writes of Kore, as an “absolute concept,” in reference to the grammatical mode of intensifying meaning when root words are doubled.⁷² Describing what happens in this instance, Marsden writes, “by means of a thorough-going negativity, that which is negative proceeds beyond its limits and assumes the characteristics of the positive.”⁷³ There is an echo here, in the word Te Korekore of the manner in which black negative space in interpretations of minimalist abstract art acquires presence. Yet Marsden’s distancing of this notion from modernist conceptions of the void, also alludes to underlying metaphysical conceptions that differentiate this idea from Western tradition. Instead what emerges are analogies for becoming that rest on notions of growth in the natural world.

Marsden also refers to *Te Waipuna Ariki* “(the divine fountain of Io the fountainhead)” within the Io tradition.⁷⁴ Within this view, *Te Waipuna Ariki* borders Hawaiki Tapu in the realm of Te Pō. *Te Waipuna Ariki* appears to act as a conduit of “primal energy” from the realm of Te Korekore, through Te Pō and into Te Ao Mārama as a “process of continuous creation and recreation.”⁷⁵ Marsden adds: “Through the great path of Tāne linking these three realms there is a two-way traffic: the spirits of the departed descending to Hawaiki and that which is in the process of becoming ascending to the world of being.”⁷⁶ For Marsden, these narratives support the concept of a “dynamic

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Marsden adds: “While it does not entirely emancipate itself from the negative, it does become relatively positive.” Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 21. Io is understood as the origin of the cosmic process.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Another version reads as follows: “Spirits of the dead were said to go either to Te Po (the underworld) or to Hawaiki (a paradisaal homeland). Hawaiki was not only the realm of the ancestors but also a source of life and fertility. Like Hawaiki, Te Po was thought to be a place from where infants

universe” in which the act of creation is continuous: “The universe is not static but is a stream of processes and events.”⁷⁷ Marsden makes a connection between cosmic process and the structure of Māori language itself, reiterating the interconnection between language and myth in Māori culture. He writes, as “...there is no verbal tense in Māori. Time is a continuous stream. The temporal is subordinated under the cosmic process and denotes not time but sequences in processes and events which occur in the cosmic process.”⁷⁸

The image of the spiral also represents the nature of hermeneutics, outside of Māori tradition. Supporting Marsden’s thesis, Stewart-Harawira highlights the particular expression of “singing the world into being” which is encapsulated in the hermeneutic of the double spiral “as an expression of the nature of Being and existence, [and] of genealogical connection from the earth to the cosmos and back...”⁷⁹ He defines the double spiral metaphor as a contemporary hermeneutical device for understanding “socio/politico/economic ontologies of being” at a time in history in which we are asked to attend to the “nature of our relationship to [the] world.”⁸⁰ Reading Hotere becomes enfolded within a process of ‘singing the world into being’ as it were, as the interpreter engages with his work.

Relational ontologies

Māori cosmo-genealogical narratives support an ethics of relation between humans and non-humans. Stewart-Harawira argues that human connectedness to the natural world is

originated.” J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann eds., *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopaedia of Beliefs and Practices*, (Santa Barbara: ABC – CLIO, 2010), 1802.

⁷⁷ Marsden writes: “Two conclusions emerge from this: the idea of continuous creation and the idea of a dynamic universe. These ideas are inclusive. The universe is not static but is a stream of processes and events. This concept also includes the idea that history is not cyclical but lineal – it is an on-going process. But the Māori did not develop the idea of a goal of history.” Marsden, *The Woven Universe*, 21. Marsden continues: “Each man is an event within the one ongoing procession of nature and so is each created object. Man withdraws from the mainstream of the universal process by returning to the realm of Hawaiki, there to continue a spiritual existence after the pattern of the earthly one.” Ibid., 21-22. And: “The ultimate reality, therefore, is Io, and the expression of this reality is the cosmic process in which all things are immersed and find their reality. So the temporal is subordinate to the eternal, the material to the spiritual, for the situation below is ordered by an ideal determination from above by Io as origin of the cosmic process.” Ibid., 22.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Stewart-Harawira, “Returning the Sacred,” 74.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

a “central tenet of many Indigenous epistemologies” and, following Mason Durie, a “defining characteristic of Indigenous peoples.”⁸¹ Following Manukau Henare and James Henare, he refers to the basis of an ontological system that underpins an interrelated cosmos, where genealogical connection to the natural environment is a primary characteristic. Stewart-Harawira presents the notion of “*mauri* as the vital spark or energy of life in all creation, a force which originates from the Primary Life Force, known by various names.”⁸² He examines the potentiality of “indigenous ontologies” for a revitalised consideration of the relationship between humans and the natural world. In support of this idea, John Reid, Tremane Barr, and Simon Lambert characterise the indigenous worldview as “one of connectivity and, in particular, the experience of ‘Being’ as a community of interconnected living personas, only some of whom are human.”⁸³ These authors refer to an anthropological definition of “animism” as the governing worldview: “whereby the entire world reveals itself as spiritually ‘animated’ by kin-connected human and non-human persons.”⁸⁴ Whakapapa and mauri are key terms for Māori within this relational ontology:

Whakapapa means that everything is connected genealogically. Each entity (a being) that together forms Everythingness (Being) is considered animated by what is termed mauri, which can be translated to mean ‘life essence.’⁸⁵

While the specific narratives differ— Rachel Wolfgramm and Cheryl Waetford acknowledge the plurality of particular interpretations and characteristics of the cosmo-genealogical narratives, and maintain the point that there is no single grand narrative

⁸¹ See M. Durie, *Nga Tai Matatu. Tides of Māori Endurance* (Victoria; Australia: Oxford Publishing Press, 2005) in Stewart-Harawira, “Returning the Sacred: Indigenous Ontologies in Perilous Times,” 81.

⁸² Alternative definitions include: “the binding force between the physical and the spiritual.” Barlow, *Tikanga Whakaro: Key Concepts in Māori Culture* (Oxford, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991). The “animating force” in nature. Marsden and Henare, *Kaitiakitanga: A Definitive Introduction to the Holistic World View of the Māori* (Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, 1992), cited in Stewart-Harawira, “Returning the Sacred: Indigenous Ontologies in Perilous Times,” 82. See Manukau Henare, “Tapu, Mana, Mauri, Hau. Wairua: a Māori philosophy of Vitalism and the Cosmos,” in *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community*, ed. J.A. Grim (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 197-221.

⁸³ John Reid, Tremane Barr, and Simon Lambert, “Indigenous Sustainability Indicators for Māori Farming and Fishing Enterprises. A Theoretical Framework” (Agricultural Research Group on Sustainability: 2013), 4. The NZ Sustainability Dashboard Research Report 13/06. www.nzdashboard.org.nz (accessed 6 November 2018).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

that claims precedence—an underpinning philosophical paradigm provides consensus. Wolfgramm and Waetford state that the “inter-connectedness of the spiritual, human, and physical worlds is both implicit and explicit in a Māori epistemology and ontology.”⁸⁶ They refer to a “Māori philosophy of vitalism” as the foundation of the notion and outworking of whakapapa.⁸⁷ Manukau Henare outlines this philosophy through the terms “*tapu, mana, mauri, hau, and wairu*.”⁸⁸ These terms inform an interconnected and “holistic approach to environmental and ecological care” and part of a “spiral of traditional ethics.”⁸⁹ From a theological perspective, Henare Tate’s account of Māori consciousness emphasises the notion of *tapu*, defined as “being and its relationships.”⁹⁰ He outlines this notion as a central “goal of life,” as “the possession of the fullness of *tapu*” at the centre of a “dynamically interconnected” network of relationships that defines Māori consciousness.⁹¹

Māori consciousness and spirituality is understood and upheld through the recitation of genealogical narratives. Wolfgramm and Waetford present the “purposive function” of

⁸⁶ Rachel Wolfgramm and Cheryl Waetford, “Spiritual Efficacy and Transcendental Phenomenology: Accessing the Contemplative from a Māori Perspective,” Stream 20: “The Role of the Contemplative in Workplace Organization, Exploring Spiritualities, theologies, philosophies and ethics,” *The Sixth International Critical Management Studies (CMS) Conference*, (University of Warwick, UK, July 13th and July 15th, 2009), 4.

⁸⁷ Wolfgramm and Waetford follow M.A. Henare, “The changing images of nineteenth century: Māori society –from tribes to nation,” (PhD in Māori Studies, Victoria University, Wellington, 2003). *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁸ Henare, “Tapu, Mana, Mauri, Hau. Wairua: a Māori philosophy of Vitalism and the Cosmos,” 204.

⁸⁹ Henare, “Tapu, Mana, Mauri, Hau. Wairua: a Māori philosophy of Vitalism and the Cosmos,” 212, 213. “...-ethic of life essences, vitalism, reverence for life (*mauri*) – ethic of being and potentiality, the sacred (*tapu*) – ethic of power, authority, and common good (*mana*) – ethic of spiritual power of obligatory reciprocity in relationships with nature (*hau*) – ethic of the spirit and spirituality (*wairuatanga*)...” Henare, “Tapu, Mana, Mauri, Hau. Wairua: a Māori philosophy of Vitalism and the Cosmos,” 213.

⁹⁰ Tate writes: “*Tapu* is one concept that has three related perspectives. Firstly, *tapu* is the restricted or controlled access to other beings *Atua, tangata* and *whenua*. [Tate explains further]: (*Tapu* restrictions, in general, form a system of restrictions or prohibitions. They restrict the encounters of *tangata* with other *tangata*, with *whenua*, and with *Atua*. They restrict the access of *tangata* to objects and *taonga* (special possessions). Secondly, *tapu* is ‘being,’ understood as ‘being-in-itself... (*Te tapu i* is primarily being-in-itself. There are five elements that qualify the essential nature of *te tapu i*: *te tapu i* encompasses *existence*; this existence is *intrinsic* to *te tapu i*; *te tapu i* is dynamically ordered towards *totality and fullness*; because of this, *te tapu i* is understood as *source and fulfilment* of all other *tapu*. Finally, from *te tapu i* emanate *extensions of tapu*.) Thirdly, *tapu* is being-in-relationships with primary being or with other beings, such that the relationships enhance, sustain, restore, and empower those in relationship.” Henare Arekatera Tate “Towards Some Foundations of a Systematic Māori Theology He tirohanga anganui ki etahi kaupapa hohonu mote whakapono Māori,” (PhD. Diss. Melbourne College of Divinity, 2010), 45; 67; 44.

⁹¹ Tate, *He Puna Iti i te Ao Mārama: A Little Spring in the World of Light* (Auckland: Libro International, 2012), 38-40.

creation narratives within the Māori worldview as integral modes of expression that assist in the upholding of the “intimate interrelationships between the spiritual, social and natural worlds and the indeterminacy of evolutionary processes...”⁹² The process of recital and ‘active’ interpretation has a way of contextualising or grounding the genealogical narratives in the present and of contributing to an understanding of human relationship with the natural world.

Whakapapa is used as a heuristic device for articulating relationships that extend from the physical and natural realms into a cosmological community. It is used to describe and provide explanatory power to the phenomenological world.

Whakapapa is a central feature of a Māori knowledge, learning and leadership paradigm and is part of a knowledge system that explicitly expresses and reflects understandings of the intricacies of world systems, evolutionary processes and the role of humans in the cosmos. Whakapapa is transmitted through a variety of mediums including oral traditions, myth, metaphors, stories and whakairo (carvings) with humility, humour, flair and imagination.⁹³

The artist or poet also has an important role to play in communicating and exploring this interconnected ontology. Stewart-Harawira refers to “the songs that the land holds” as an echo and continuation of the “the same songs that first sang the world into being.”⁹⁴ This poetic approach enables a way of thinking through the way Hotere’s work disseminates Māori consciousness and spirituality, (and I think of *Te kūaka* in particular). Marsden would have approved of Hotere’s role in reflecting Māori tradition, as he believed poetry was the best ground for addressing this field of knowledge – the “existential dimension of Māori life” – over anthropological or scientific expression.⁹⁵

Conclusions

Hotere’s use of black can be read within the ancestral narratives of Hotere’s iwi, Aupōuri as an iconographical reference. But what primarily emerges here is an association of Hotere’s work, with a relationally defined ontological and

⁹² Wolfgramm and Waetford, “Spiritual Efficacy and Transcendental Phenomenology,” 3.

⁹³ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁴ Stewart-Harawira, “Returning the Sacred,” 83.

⁹⁵ Marsden, *The Woven Universe*, 22.

epistemological orientation for understanding human consciousness and relationships within a Māori worldview. This happens through a hermeneutical engagement with his work. Such a worldview manifests in Hotere's works in several ways. Black, as associated with the realm of Te Pō, embodies the notion of becoming at the beginning of creation. It is also the transitional realm of death. Described as a series of intensities of darkness that sometimes recall natural elements, the cycles of the moon for example, Te Pō is a central part of a wider a cosmo-genealogical narrative upheld by the notion of whakapapa and mauri. Te Kore and Te Ao Mārama can also be read within Hotere's canvases, as they are said to become present through recitation – following the logic of moteatea. The relational ontology that emerges within the notion of whakapapa defines a consciousness that is deeply concerned with the interconnectedness of the world, and elicits an ethics of relation as a guiding principle for life. Understanding Hotere's concern for the natural environment takes on a particularly spiritual mode through these terms.

The use of language in Hotere's art also communicates this worldview. Linguistic patterns relate to myth, and language relates to myth, as time is continuous in Māori language with its lack of verbal tense. Ford, for example, considers Hotere's use of text within a larger conception of the way the repetition of language in reading his work contributes to an understanding of the larger mythologies that sustain his work:

...the way Ralph repeats the word so it's no longer a word, but he's repeated a word so that it becomes a sentence, and it becomes a paragraph, and so it becomes a novel, so it becomes a myth. And so it becomes a pattern. But you see, I mean the pattern grew so that it could relate to the myth anyway.⁹⁶

The recitation of genealogical narratives upholds the notion of an interconnected cosmos. Hotere recited black, the realm of becoming, and even the swirling reflective sheens of the surfaces of some of his works are recitative. These surfaces draw the viewer to connect and participate within the narrative through perceptual and physical encounter. Hotere embodies Marsden's endorsement of the role of the artist or poet as best suited to convey a Māori worldview.

⁹⁶ Ford, "E koe ano!," 119.

The double spiral as a hermeneutical metaphor for understanding a Māori worldview and human relationship with the world, also reflects the hermeneutical stance of reading along with Hotere. Panoho argues that Hotere ‘makes sense’ of his modernist whakapapa from a Māori perspective. Hotere’s more explicit postcolonial and global political statements might also be redefined if one affirms the ethical demands of a relational worldview. The collaborative nature of many of Hotere’s works also supports a relational mode of working, dismantling the notion of the singular modern artist as genius. Thus an embodied and phenomenological perspective that affirms relational being and becoming, can also be found within the contemplative process of viewing Hotere’s work.

CHAPTER SIX

Interpreting Hotere's spiritual sensibility

Overview

Hotere's work occasions a bicultural experience. Reading Hotere's spiritual genealogy also engenders interreligious dialogue. In his work, Western mysticism meets Eastern philosophy meets Māori cosmology. Hotere's modernist heritage draws upon the esoteric spiritual genealogy of monochrome painting (following Reinhardt's specific iteration). Here Zen Buddhism and the influence of Chinese painting, contribute to the nexus. The interreligious encounter between Māori and Catholic spiritualities in his work reflects the context of Hotere's heritage and upbringing.

In this chapter I avoid an analytical comparison and contrast between these disparate traditions. The specificity of Hotere's work also resists a direct translation into a specific theological school of thought. Instead, I present Hotere's work as a theopoetic topography of spiritual paradigms. His work affirms a relational and embodied location of the everyday as a site for divine encounter. The image of the double spiral as a hermeneutical metaphor for the process of distilling meaning in Hotere, takes the form of a theopoetic gathering of voices.

Hotere's spiritual sensibility places traditions of apophaticism alongside a relational paradigm. In this chapter I intend to explore this conflation from the perspective of the contemplative position of the viewer. This interpretive stance is inclusive of multiple perspectives of interpretation, given the multiple representative theological, philosophical, spiritual and religious traditions we find within Hotere. I draw upon these disparate strands to present an interpretive synthesis.

In support of this synthesis, I consider the tradition of the spiritual in art and the contribution of theological aesthetics towards understanding the analogy between aesthetic experience and religious experience. But first, a brief recap of the interpretive findings from the previous chapters is necessary. Hotere literature and criticism has not shied away from the spiritual traditions implicit in his work. The literature offers points of departure for a closer consideration of Hotere's spiritual sensibility, the interpretation

of which resides primarily with the viewer. Three categories emerge, from which to interpret the particularities of Hotere's spiritual sensibility: Catholic, Modern, Māori.

Catholic

I approached Hotere's Catholic sensibility first through his *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* works, which have been described as representing one of his more salient iterations of Catholicism. The predominant use of gold in these works alludes to candlelit liturgical practices and gilded liturgical structures. The Roman Catholic Tenebrae service is one such liturgical allusion. A contemplative spirituality can be read into the picture frame; distilled in the quietness of a candle-lit night window. In this context black is also a form of elegy. Hotere's *Requiem* series serves as an appropriate example. Baker refers to the expression of a religious sensibility in these works as "equivalent to but not specifically that of organised religion."¹ At this point the question of religious art comes to the fore. Can these works be understood as contributing to a religious practice for the viewer? The answer is yes, but it depends on the viewer's disposition.

Hotere's use of symbolic motifs that belong to the history of Catholic liturgical practice also supports a reading of Hotere's work within the context of religion. The Sacred Heart is a prominent example. Hotere often used this motif in conjunction with intercessory pleas for environmental responsibility. Turning again to the histories of mystical theology, the Sacred Heart has direct ties to traditions of reading the Song of Songs. St John of the Cross provides commentary here. In association with the Song of Songs, the Sacred Heart reads as a mirror for the soul and the divine in union. The Sacred Heart in Hotere's work as a reflective device, restates in symbolic form, the literal mirror-like quality of his painted surfaces. What also emerges here is the connection between the "soul and the Cosmos"² within the multifaceted reflective surface of the Heart, of the painting, the self and the world. Within the mirror we find the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the universe and the divine. St John of the Cross also plunges us into a literary reading of Hotere's work, as the mystical journey is at the same time embedded in the text. If experience of the divine occurs through writing, it

¹ Baker, "A World of Black and Light," 210.

² López-Baralt, "The Heart or *Qalb*," n.p.

must also occur through painting, as ‘dark illumination’ is *gracefully* received – and it is only through grace, that the divine light is perceived within the darkness.

As a representative of negative theology, the figure of St John of the Cross emerges as a key interpretive interlocutor within Hotere interpretation. First, the literary trope of the ‘dark night’ becomes a contemplative space in which, through grace, the soul finds God. This tradition is transposed through the apophatic monochrome of abstract modern art. In this context, with the help of Merton, the abstract monochrome can be regarded as a device for meditation and, from Tillich’s perspective, a symbol to initiate an experience of ‘depth’ – as an experience of the divine.

Modern

Reading Hotere’s religious sensibility alongside modernist monochrome painters shifts his interpretive register to a different key. Reinhardt, Klein, Tàpies and Hotere all engage with the notion of aesthetic contemplation which is the primary resolve of abstract monochrome art of twentieth century modernism. The work of Reinhardt, Klein and Tàpies provides alternative interpretive lenses within the modernist paradigm, shedding light on different aspects of Hotere’s work.

As an example, Hotere’s *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* works enfold the viewer within reflective surfaces. Often set within a readymade wooden window frame, these works resemble views of the night from a lit up interior space. The viewer and the interior environment they inhabit is reflected within an inky black reflective pane. While one is looking outwards, into the night, one sees oneself reflected in return. These works present a metaphor for an inherent subjectivity. In these works, Hotere transposes Reinhardt’s modern artworld apophaticism. The physicality of the phenomenological experience is engendered in Hotere’s and Reinhardt’s works through varying manifestations of technical language and material qualities. Yet both their respective black paintings may be understood under the concept of aesthetic contemplation “aimed at transforming consciousness.”³

³ Munroe, “Art of Perceptual Experience,” n.p.

The form of orientalism apparent within modern art served to embrace notions of non-dualist thought and a consciousness embedded in the everyday. Specific concepts attached to motifs, like the cypher Zero, which Hotere employed readily within his oeuvre, draw out other associations. Hotere's word-for-word borrowing of the manifesto of the Zero group, affirms his relationship with international modernism. Here also we find a sense of collaboration; the notion of Zero as infinity; the Tao as the void from which Yin and Yang occur; and the void as presence not absence. Bridging the divides of some of the underlying principles of these terms, and outside of their specific intentionality, we also find a resonance with Māori cosmo-genealogical notions of nothingness and darkness that elicit presence and not absence. But the specifics of these notions seem to confound interpretation rather than clarifying it. I am also underqualified to undertake interreligious dialogue between Eastern and Māori spiritual traditions.

Klein's approach to the abstract monochrome provides another interpretive window for reading Hotere's work. A Catholic form of sacramentalism provides a conceptual underpinning to Klein's work. This approach to understanding Hotere's work is not immediate. What Hotere offers his viewers through liturgical motifs, is instead emblematic of Roman Catholicism. Klein's phenomenological leaning towards the poetry of matter, following Bachelard, provides a potential way of reading Hotere's relationship with the elements of fire and water and so on – as the 'illumination of matter.' Here the viewer's phenomenological encounter is considered direct and unmediated. This immediacy sits in contrast to a mediated encounter through visual representations of the divine in icon logic, for example. Klein's notion of contemplation involved the viewer's total engagement with colour. Hotere did not privilege colour in the same way, but the metaphysical 'illumination of matter' might still apply to a reading of his engagement with the spectrum of light in particular. Both artists considered paintings as windows for the viewer to conduct contemplative practices.

The notion of contemplation is also paramount for Tàpies, reframed with reference to the importance of everyday materials as a metaphysical locus. In Tàpies, matter is given a more prominent position. If Klein seeks the poetic essence of material reality, Tàpies

makes an inversive move through placing this essence right in front of the viewer, in the thing itself. At times Hotere used paint that maintained an indexical connection to the subject matter of his work. The black paint in Hotere's *Song of Solomon* (1991, ref. 13) with Cilla McQueen reads as oil and refers to their commentary on the Gulf War.⁴ A literary sensibility is shared by Tàpies and Hotere, and they both privilege the materiality of text through embedding literature within their painting.

Underneath the idiosyncratic tendencies of these modern artists lies a general theory of abstract art with roots in the Romantic tradition of the sublime. Aesthetic contemplation in painting maintains a connection with the theoesthetics that emerged with the Romantics. A neo-platonic metaphysical understanding of the abstract monochrome provides one way of art historically contextualising Hotere's art. The 'One-Many' theme that drives the viewer to conceive the fullness of the ONE, the Absolute, or a union with absolute reality remains prominent in Hotere's work. At the same time, Eastern mysticisms that do not share the same metaphysical paradigm as Western apophaticism govern a non-dualist interpretation of modern abstract art. Reinhardt, Klein and Tàpies all show that there are exceptions to a generalised interpretive framework for abstract art, and Hotere himself provides his own interpretation of this tradition, which ultimately becomes metaphysically transposed with reference to the Māori *soul* of his oeuvre.

Māori

Hotere's Māori sensibility presents an altogether different spiritual tradition to that of his modern heritage. Here we find an intimately interconnected relational paradigm that defines traditions of whakapapa and mauri. A relational ontology sits in opposition to Western neo-platonic 'oneness.' It can also be argued that indigenous Māori creation mythology becomes present for the viewer through their encounter with Hotere's work.

⁴ See Joanna Osborne, "Encountering the Song of Spring in Ralph Hotere and Cilla McQueen's *Song of Solomon*," *The Bible and Critical Theory*, Vol 2. No 1. (2015).

Summary

Several categories emerge for analysing Hotere's spiritual disposition. I considered Hotere's Roman Catholic sensibility, including his use of symbolism, drawing out the implications of reading his work through liturgical analogy; I considered the notion of the dark night of soul as analogy, with a focus on the material and literary aspects of this reading. Hotere's modernist heritage places the notion of aesthetic contemplation in the foreground. A Māori philosophy of vitalism affirms an interconnected relational ontology as an interpretive framework for reading Hotere. Hotere's collaborative literary sensibility and his political and environmental commitments, qualify and specify these spiritual or religious categories.

Hotere's religious sensibility, the notion of aesthetic contemplation, and the interpretive implications of an indigenous relational ontology, are key interpretive locations. The wider context of the spiritualisation of art within the paradigm of modernism provides a necessary background. Yet the analogy between aesthetic experience and mystical experience emerges as a primary location for theological engagement.

Content and interpretive approach

Some methodological issues come to the fore when accounting for the melting pot of interpretive approaches in this chapter. Having categorised a series of interpretive perspectives, I now consider how these categories can be interpreted together. A form of art world interreligious dialogue could be one way of approaching this task. But in order to structure my interpretation I begin with the notion of aesthetic contemplation, which enfolds Hotere's use of material religious symbolism and is complemented by his indigenous spiritual heritage.

In this chapter I go on to review the spiritualisation of art in the modern world as a necessary contextualisation for a reading of the theological implications of aesthetic contemplation. I consider the way theological aesthetics contributes to an understanding of the relation between aesthetic contemplation and religious experience. I draw again on Merton as an intermediary between art world apophaticism and religious experience. I conclude by considering Hotere's work as a theopoetic expression that draws together

an interpretation of apophaticism and relationality that has ethical implications. Reading along with Hotere becomes a form of theopoetics as it invites the viewer to participate in a creative conflation of spiritual perspectives. Within this last category, I want to affirm an approach that values a ‘diffractive’ form of reading that is inclusive of difference. Here, the boundaries between traditions, historical loci, and ontological frameworks, are acknowledged through juxtaposition and refraction rather than contradiction. I conclude with affirming the relational ethics that underpins Hotere’s work. In overview, I highlight a materially grounded understanding of the religious content and symbolism in Hotere’s oeuvre, and how this impacts the wider context of his work, as an outward facing form of protest, prayer, song or elegy.

Interpreting the divine

There are differing ways of understanding relations to the divine in Hotere’s work, which have a way of spiralling around each other within the process of interpretation. First, the divine is understood through symbolic language: through religious convention and narrative. Second, Hotere’s use of language and the materiality of text and painting converge with religious tradition to engage the viewer through an embodied experience. Third, the divine is understood through a phenomenological paradigm, mediated through aesthetic contemplation implicit with the psychology of the individual viewer. Fourth, an ontological dimension is encompassed as the divine is understood through a relational notion of being. These aspects combine or are related within the whole experience of reading. I emphasise a displacement from disembodied tradition of the spiritual in art, affirming instead a relationally defined embodied approach to the aesthetic encounter. An interpretation of Hotere’s work that hermeneutically spirals, when read through the lens of Māori consciousness and relational ontology. This common interpretive metaphor also has a visual genealogy within Māori iconography, and the swirling reflective darkness of many of Hotere’s works.

Implicit within the interpretive nexus is a conflict between dualist thought (the tradition of the sublime in the train of modern abstract art) and the interconnected relational ontology of Māori spirituality. There is a conflict between general worldviews that either favour transcendence over immanence, or vice versa. Hotere’s abstract

monochrome asks the viewer to stand before a *seeming void*; to face the Absolute. Yet, as an example, the swirling light often present within the surfaces of Hotere's works also alludes to the spiralling layers of a cosmology made present. A circle, a cross, a Sacred Heart, variously embedded across Hotere's oeuvre, can be read from several perspectives: redolent of the spiritual orientalism of modern art, or maintaining a resonance with Western apophatic traditions. The combination of elements need not contradict each other, but instead as they are read together, they refract or reform the interpretation. Each facet of interpretation might act as a hermeneutical hook for understanding another facet. The symbol of Christ within the mystical mirroring tradition of the Sacred Heart, is mirrored in the reflective surface of the abstract monochrome, for example. From another angle we might read the presence of Te Kore, Te Pō, Te Ao Mārama, in conjunction with the Sacred Heart, literally framed within the window of aesthetic contemplation. Maori Marsden also presents a correlation between the notion of the sacramental in specific rites found in both the Māori worldview and Christianity.⁵ He seeks to demonstrate that "certain spiritual principles are universal in application."⁶

Difference becomes enfolded in relation, as possible interpretations trail off in multiple directions away from the single viewpoint of an individual viewer. Two or more people gathered in front of a Hotere work see themselves together – a relation in otherness – and interpretation shifts again through a collective lens. The theology of Hotere's remains an interpretive excess, as it underpins the conceptual histories that contextualise his work. Do these interpretive elements contribute to a conceptual framework for art as an analogy for religion? Or is each viewer responsible for their own theological standing?

A material religion enters the interpretive task through Hotere's liturgical symbolism, which influences an understanding of Hotere's modernist heritage that resists

⁵ Marsden writes: "To the Maori, a sacrament is simply 'the means by which mana (charisma, grace, spiritual power) is transmitted to humans'. The means used could be a specific element (water) from the created world; or another person by tactile transmission." Maori Marsden, "God, Man and Universe: A Māori View," in *Te Ao Hurihuri: Aspects of Māoritanga*, ed. Michael King (Auckland: Reed Books, 1992), 124-125.

⁶Ibid., 130.

disembodied spirituality. Hotere's works, his *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* series exude Catholicism but are not liturgical in an institutional sense. Wider religious narratives enter Hotere's work through his use of religious symbols, maintaining a religious intention within a wider interpretive setting: I read these motifs as commentary on whatever the subject of his work may be – environmental, political, postcolonial.

The political, the environmental, the postcolonial, the bicultural, the indigenous, the modernist, and the Catholic aspects of Hotere's work, frame and reframe his spiritual sensibility as they are read together. The secular and sacred intermingle. Theological contributions to Hotere interpretation meet at all these points in different ways, and a multiplicity of readings spiral out beyond the artist's intention.

What if a synthetic reading was possible? As a catalyst, I suggest Catherine Keller's recent work that explores the connection between relationality and apophaticism.⁷ As we see in Hotere's work, a philosophy of vitalism meets the apophatic tradition. The theopoetics that Keller espouses also emerges as a potential way of reading Hotere's practice as a form of theology. When the poet is privileged as upholding an interpretation of the Māori worldview, a poetics provides a challenge to a more categorical or anthropological interpretation of cosmo-mythologies.

Aesthetic contemplation

Hotere's art historical situation as a late modern artist is a place to begin a synthetic reading of his spiritual sensibilities. Here the notion of aesthetic contemplation is the primary category of interpretation. Within the interpretive category of his modernist whakapapa, a western contemplative paradigm is central, but the technique (or personality of the artist) that activates the viewer's experience, differ in this context. Phenomenological theories also differ: Reinhardt opts for an optical analogy; Klein's phenomenology of colour is carried on the back of a Bachelardian poetics; and for Tàpies, the material thing is a conduit for the viewer to grasp ultimate reality. The modernist interest in apophatic mysticisms also brings the neo-platonic One into the picture plane.

⁷ Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

Interpretation of the spiritual characteristic of monochrome painting is governed by a mode of aesthetic contemplation. Here also enters the possibility of reading this genre of painting through traditions of theology. First, a theological paradigm which aligns with the development of aesthetics can be traced within the notion of contemplation as a vehicle for spiritual experience. Second, Catholic theological aesthetics presents an avenue to examine this phenomenological encounter that has its origins in the analogy of the senses. The conceptual history of the unity between sense experience and spiritual experience within theological tradition is expansive. Here I present a brief overview, with Hotere in mind.

The spiritual in art

Hotere's work sits within the tradition of the spiritualisation of art, which has its origins within the inward subjective turn towards religious experience implicit within an early understanding of aesthetics. The origins of the definition of aesthetics as influenced through theology, is also relevant here. Towards outlining this connection, Johann Joachim Winckelmann could be cited as a forerunner of the modern affirmation of "inner feeling (*die innere Empfindung*)," within the viewer's appreciation of works of art.⁸ For Winckelmann it was Greco-Roman art that epitomised the notion of artistic inspiration through beauty, alongside the influence of eighteenth century Lutheran Pietist spirituality. As David Morgan puts it,

[the] idea of an inner feeling and a subdued grandeur or sublimity in Winckelmann's aesthetic...was informed by Pietism's cultivation of an inner state of quiet, keyed to the contemplation of sublime subjects such as the passion and death of Jesus, [with] a private devotionism, and an empathy keyed to visuality...".⁹

⁸ See Morgan, "Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion," 29. See Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. by Elfriede Heuer and Roger C. Norton (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987), 41, 35, 13, in cited in *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹ Morgan, "Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion," 29, 31. Morgan cites Mosche Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art, 1: From Winckelmann to Baudelaire* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 115-116.

The Lutheran Protestant tradition also influenced Alexander Baumgarten (educated at the Lutheran university of Halle) who coined the term *aesthetics* in 1739. As Morgan argues, “intuitive discernment and an autonomous judgement” defined the aesthetic feeling.¹⁰ The notion of aesthetics was built upon by Karl Philipp Moritz, with the development of the concept of “disinterested contemplation,”¹¹ and became associated with a kind of transcendence or even revelation, which as Morgan observes “seems unabashedly mystical.”¹² Art was considered a means to connect with the divine through nature; as Morgan puts it, art was “the visualization of the invisible inwardness of all things.”¹³ It became a “material expression” of the soul and “a privileged revelation of genius.”¹⁴ The experience of art is considered mystical, according to Bernard Berenson, “when the spectator is at one with the work of art he is looking at”; the “aesthetic moment is a moment of mystic vision.”¹⁵ The championing of a spiritualisation of vision defines this movement: a momentary transcendence from material circumstances that can also be described as having a redemptive or transformative element.¹⁶

The notion of the sublime as an aesthetic category with a theological heritage emerges here. Morgan traces the influence of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, going on to relate the notion of the sublime to terms used in theological application: Rudolf Otto’s “numinous” and Paul Tillich’s notion of the “ultimate.”¹⁷ The notion of the sublime defines the autonomy of art as a subjective spiritual experience in distinction from institutionalised religion. This sensibility can arguably be read as a religious (defined as spiritual) current that can be traced through modern art. Wassily Kandinsky, as a founding spokesperson for the ‘spiritual in art,’ argued that the artist as “prophet” led the viewer “beyond the material vulgarities of the day.”¹⁸ Echoing this sentiment in a

¹⁰ Morgan, “Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion,” 31.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 32.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, [1948] 1954), 93, in Morgan, “Art and Religion in the Modern Age,” in Elkins and Morgan, *Re-Enchantment*, 34.

¹⁶ Morgan, “Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion,” 33.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

later context, Clive Bell (who was arguably a significant influence on early art criticism in New Zealand),¹⁹ writes, “Art and religion are...two roads by which men escape from circumstances to ecstasy.”²⁰

Schleiermacher can be named as the inaugurator of modern religious faith, termed as a form of “aesthetic awareness”: “the essence of religion” is “the sensibility and taste for the infinite.”²¹ This sensibility is defined in terms of an “immediate consciousness,” in a unity of subjectivity and objectivity that occurs in sensory perception.²² In Schleiermacher’s terms it is the “first mysterious moment that occurs in every sensory perception, before intuition and feeling have separated, where sense and its objects have, as it were, flowed into one another and become one.”²³ Here the notion of divinity is defined as a form of religious intuition.²⁴ Mark C. Taylor locates the emergence of a theoesthetic paradigm which “implicitly and explicitly informs aesthetic theory as well as artistic and architectural practices down to our own day.”²⁵ Thus, in Taylor’s words, “union with the Absolute or the Real, which underlies or dwells within every person and all phenomena” is the intended end of artistic abstraction, and is asked also to bear the weight of spiritual aspirations for social transformation.²⁶

Tracing this correlation between an experience-based definition of religion with an

¹⁹ Francis Pound, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art & National Identity, 1930-1970* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), 97. Roger Fry was also a significant influence and who also held art in relation to religion, although on different terms. “I think Art is like religion; I’m not at all sure it isn’t the same thing or rather an outcome of the same emotion—the emotion of the universal.” Roger Fry, *Letters of Roger Fry, Volume 2.*, ed. Denys Sutton (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), 389.

²⁰ Clive Bell, “Art and Religion,” in Bell, *Art* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1914) in Morgan, “Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion,” 33.

²¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. by Richard Crouter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 103, in Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 21.

²² Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 21-22.

²³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 112, in Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 21-22.

²⁴ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 136, in Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 22.

²⁵ Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 46. Taylor provides a list of principles that define the ontotheological paradigm of what he terms theoesthetics. “1. Divine reality is not merely transcendent but is also immanent in the world. 2. The self is inseparably related to or even identical with divine reality. 3. This primal unity is lost when human beings fall into a condition of division and conflict. 4. The goal of human life, as well as the cosmos as a whole, is to return to this original unity. 5. The only way to achieve this goal is through the enlightenment brought by spiritual practice.” Taylor, *Refiguring the Spiritual: Beuys, Barney, Turrell, Goldsworthy* (New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2012), 50.

²⁶ Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 52. Taylor elaborates: “Reversing Hegel’s dialectical progression from art through religion to philosophy, artists of widely differing ideological orientations and stylistic persuasions have maintained that in a world where religion seems increasingly irrelevant and philosophy moribund, art alone can re-figure humankind’s deepest spiritual preoccupations and aspirations.” *Ibid.*, 52.

experience-based aesthetic encounter, art historian Robert Rosenblum provides a systematic reading of modern art. He names a connection between the formal and thematic sympathies of Caspar David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* (c. 1809, ref. 41) and Mark Rothko's *Green on Blue* (1956, ref. 42). Rosenblum does not focus on formal qualities alone but considers, "the religious dilemmas posed in the Romantic movement, upon the combination of subject, feeling, and structure," in artists of Northern Europe and the United States.²⁷ The beginning of this trajectory is marked by Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*, which depicts a single figure on the shore of a dark ominous seascape as an image, in Rosenblum's words, of "the individual...pitted against, or confronted by the overwhelming, incomprehensible immensity of the universe..."²⁸ Friedrich's artistic concerns are here correlated with Schleiermacher's theological endeavours. Rosenblum notes a relationship to the Romantic sensibility in which personal religious experience is relocated within the primacy of nature, outside of institutionalised religious iconography.

Tracing this Romantic sensibility through to abstraction, Rosenblum presents Mondrian, via the influence of cubism, as a significant artist who represents a transposition of the subject matter often employed by artists of Romanticism: "sea, flower, tree, church – were absorbed in these ultimate distillations of the manifestations of the seen world into the language of spirit."²⁹ Rosenblum observes the beginnings of a retreat from strict depictions of material reality in depictions of dualist macrocosm versus microcosm motifs, which at the same time reflect the sensibility of "Romantic mysticism."³⁰ Like Friedrich, Mondrian turned to "the edge of the sea,"³¹ to explore the numinous implicit within the material world. In Mondrian's *Pier and Ocean* series (1915, ref. 43) there is a further distillation towards abstraction, as according to Rosenblum, "it permitted a still more profound disclosure of the spirit that lay beyond the material surfaces of

²⁷ Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 7-8. At the time of writing, Rosenblum posited an alternative reading to that of the French tradition of arts-for-arts sake, while acknowledging his unorthodox approach and warning the reader not to take his project as "fixed historical truth," noting the importance of supporting a "flexible...history of modern art." Ibid., 8.

²⁸ Ibid., 14.

²⁹ Ibid., 194.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 187.

nature...”³²

Mondrian’s annihilation of matter and objects is here complete: the vestige of the pier, projecting upward from the bottom, is totally absorbed in twinkling patterns that seem both infinitely complex in their varied overall patterns and infinitely simple in their ultimate reduction to only parallel and perpendicular relationships and to the primary luminary opposition of light and dark, white and black. These experiences of an elemental nature—spiritual, bodiless, at once awesomely simple and awesomely complex—perpetuate that Romantic sense of quasi-religious mystery behind the material surfaces of the seen world.³³

Hotere also turned to ‘the edge of the sea,’ which was for him the Northland coast of Mitimiti, in Aotearoa New Zealand. O’Brien considers Hotere’s relationship to the sea in similar terms: Hotere “[produced] hundreds of paintings exploring [a] recurrent moment on the beach when language, with all its inherent meanings, merges with the overwhelming ‘fact’ of a universe which transcends human meaning. This is a place he has stood, one way or another, all his life.”³⁴ In part to describe Hotere’s relationship with the histories of modernism, he continues:

Hotere stands on the beach, at the border, the transitional place between New Zealand and the rest of the world, between Māori and Pakeha, the known and the unknown. The artist himself becomes the meeting point of these opposites and his art becomes an act of reconciliation and integration.³⁵

As Rosenblum follows down the line to Rothko, he locates the importance of human emotion, citing Rothko’s affirmation of religious experience in correlation with emotion.³⁶ While the phenomenological frameworks of modernist monochrome painting varied significantly, the tradition of a religiously defined aesthetics has a clear presence. Hotere’s modernist sensibility can be found within this tradition. But through

³² Ibid., 189.

³³ Ibid., 191.

³⁴ O’Brien, “Miserere Mitimiti: a meeting place,” in *Hotere: Seminar Papers*, 13.

³⁵ Ibid., 13-14.

³⁶ Rothko in Seldon Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York, 1957), 93-4 in Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition*, 215.

emphasising Hotere's art as acts of reconciliation, he is not confined to this tradition.

Catholic theological aesthetics

The notion of aesthetic contemplation that grounds Hotere's modernist heritage can also be supported by reading his work in alignment with the Roman Catholic spectrum of theological aesthetics. There is an obvious inflection on subjectivity within a reading of Hotere's work, so a theological paradigm that embraces modernist subjectivity is supportive. Here the subjective turn in the transcendental Thomism of Karl Rahner, that claimed the "subject's dynamic openness" to divine mystery provides an entry point.³⁷ Rahner had within his vision a desire to engage with modern culture; was influenced by mystical theological tradition; was significant in influencing the development of Trinitarian theology; and worked through a theological existential anthropology.³⁸ In line with Schleiermacher's basis of theology within individual experience,³⁹ Rahner is situated as a scholar who addressed modern subjectivity within the task of his theology. He is also a useful figure for reading alongside Hotere with regard to his "commitment to a reorientation toward the mystery of the everyday."⁴⁰ Here I consider Rahner through the lens of Richard Viladesau's project of theological aesthetics.

³⁷ Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie - New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 25-26.

³⁸ Rahner also represents an ambiguous space. He claimed to have positioned himself as addressing the problematic of Heidegger's ontotheological claim, yet Steven Ogden argues that (like Derrida's critique of Heidegger for not resolving the question of ontotheology) Rahner's theology remains fixed within the ontotheological paradigm. See Steven G. Ogden, *The Presence of God in the World: A Contribution to Postmodern Christology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007). Ogden's definition of ontotheology is as follows: "ontotheology means to go beyond the text, the argument or the world in order to rely on being, as an external source of authority, for the purpose of justifying a belief or a set of beliefs." Ibid., 234. Here the presence of the divine is understood in metaphysical terms. As Conor Sweeney puts it, "In a Heideggerian genealogy, Rahner could be said to stand for everything that is wrong with metaphysics in theology. For his reification of a metaphysics of presence in consciousness ends up occluding and superseding the radical otherness and specificity of the Christian event." Conor Sweeney, *Sacramental Presence after Heidegger: Onto-theology, Sacraments, and the Mother's Smile* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 195.

³⁹ Rudolf Otto could also be listed here to support a theology based within individual experience and a theologian that has influenced some of the rhetoric within modern art (his coining of the "numinous"). See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, trans. by John W. Harvey (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959).

⁴⁰ Peter Joseph Fritz, *Rahner's Theological Aesthetics* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2014), 181.

Viladesau's theological aesthetics is based upon a Catholic theological anthropology of sense knowledge: the unity between sense knowledge and spiritual knowledge. As Rahner argues,

Against all attempts to safeguard religious knowledge by detaching it from other kinds of knowledge, traditional Christian anthropology has always clearly insisted that sense knowledge and spiritual knowledge constitute a unity, that all spiritual knowledge, however sublime it may be, is initiated and filled with content by sense perception.⁴¹

Viladesau's aesthetics, within the vein of a transcendental method of modern theology, follows a "phenomenology of the subject in the act of knowing."⁴² Methodologically speaking, Viladesau argues that a "'foundational' aspect of theological aesthetics would begin 'from below': it would inquire into the conditions of possibility in humanity for the reception and interpretation of a divine revelation in the forms of sensation, beauty, and art."⁴³ Viladesau's approach, as a "transcendental theory of the perception of revelation" provides an "attempt to formulate a transcendental cognitional theory that explains the revealability and knowability of God in terms of the created and engraced capacity of the human mind to participate in God's mystery."⁴⁴

Viladesau's theological aesthetics is supported by a notion of revelation. Citing Rahner's comments on a general form of sensible experience, he claims that an encounter with art could heighten this "general sense" as a "sensory experience of transcendence" through its "implicit reference to the more ultimate horizon..."⁴⁵ In this case, art is employed as an enhancement: "...art can be used to bring to light the sensory horizon and through it the transcendental horizon of the perceiving mind, the absolute."⁴⁶ As Viladesau argues,

⁴¹ Karl Rahner, "Theology of the Meaning of Religious Images," in *Theological Investigations*, Volume 13, 1992, in Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 77.

⁴² Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 120-121.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

“knowledge of sensible reality” takes place within the horizon of a nonobjective pre-apprehension of being; [and] ...any knowledge of ‘spiritual’ realities (including the knowledge of the self as spirit that is the basis for ontology) is necessarily mediated, both in its arising and in its formulation, by symbols that arise in connection with sensible experience, synthesized by imagination.⁴⁷

Viladesau cites Rahner on an “implicit” mediation of the transcendent through images, according to “the co-experienced ‘horizon’ of every sensation.”⁴⁸

At first it may seem as though viewing stops at the finite object which is immediately seen, making it thus impossible to transcend it toward the absolute God. But we may reject this and say: every experience of an object, even though the object is always a single and finite one, is carried by an a priori pre-apprehension of the whole breadth of the formal object of the sense power... Every time we see an object, we look, as it were, beyond it, into the expanse of all that may be seen... Hence...there is a kind of sensory experience of transcendence, that serves as a foundation and mediation in referring the sense-endowed spiritual subject to God.⁴⁹

The ‘inseparable’ connectedness of Rahner’s theology of revelation to human embodiment and encounter with the world underpins this theological aesthetics.⁵⁰ Rahner’s approach draws on Thomist metaphysics and Heideggerian phenomenological ontology for a phenomenology of being defined as a *supernatural existential* occurrence. Here, to be human necessarily involves the facility of an inherent openness to the infinite, and which finds its ultimate realisation through union with the divine. Knowledge of God is gained through this inherent human capacity for the comprehension of the supernatural. This constitutes the experience of the whole person, as a spiritual subject, through the mechanism of the senses, but it does depend on the “a priori openness” of the individual towards this idea.⁵¹ Thus, Viladesau states, art need

⁴⁷ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 158.

⁴⁹ Rahner, “The Theology of the Religious Meaning of Images,” 158, cited in Ibid., 158–159.

⁵⁰ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 91.

⁵¹ Ibid., 159.

not necessarily contain religious iconographical content or meaning to provide a potential mechanism of mediation for divine revelation.

The phenomenological experience within contemplating art, provides the potential for an experience of spiritual transcendence through the facility of an inherent human openness to the infinite. It could be argued that monochrome painting is consciously set up as such an horizon of vision. And a theological orientation, following Rahner, fits within the modernist vision of the turn to the Absolute within the metaphysics of monochrome painting. Within the mechanism of the painting, we are essentially dealing with an analogous form of sensory experience as an “implicit reference to the more ultimate horizon...”⁵²

Some comment on the methodological connection between Viladesau’s theological aesthetics and ‘reading’ Hotere needs to be made here. I am reminded again of Pattison’s suggestion, that the divide between the “involvement of artists with religion” and the “involvement of theology with art.”⁵³ Viladesau’s consideration of ways in which an individual might encounter the divine through art, is inclusive of the idea of art as an ‘object for contemplation.’ Hotere’s art as a site for “encountering and thinking about the transcendent,”⁵⁴ is relevant here. Yet reading along with Hotere cannot be subsumed into a single theological paradigm. Here Viladesau provides one way of framing an encounter with the transcendent, even as he seeks to see in art a way of gaining hermeneutical insight for theology.

Theological aesthetics and modern art

The modernist contemplative paradigm that defines the spiritual sensibility of Hotere’s oeuvre can be defined in the theological terms outlined above. Hotere’s windows of black light are veritable sensory horizons for the viewer. In a literal sense, Hotere’s dark surfaces are infused with coincidences of light. Horizons of light are often present within the blackness. O’Brien, in his essay on Hotere’s *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, includes a citation by Merton on poetry, writing “that the great artwork realises a

⁵² Ibid., 160.

⁵³ Pattison, *Art, Faith and Modernity*, xii.

⁵⁴ Viladesau, “Aesthetics and Religion,” 37.

‘spiritual vitality that lifts it above itself’, giving rise to a splendid array of ‘contradictions and possibilities’.⁵⁵ For O’Brien there is a “paradox” of light and dark in Hotere’s work: “The opaque surface can hold the most illuminating image. Darkness can be infused with meaning and reflected or refracted light.”⁵⁶

This ‘spiritual vitality’ that Merton mentions, refers to a complementary relationship between contemplation and aesthetics. Deba Patnaik, writes of Merton’s “insistence on the dynamics of art/poetry – its vitality, consonances, contradictions, and possibilities – [as] key to both the aesthetic and contemplative dimensions of Merton’s expression and his life.”⁵⁷ Merton adds to this:

In actual fact, neither religious nor artistic contemplation should be regarded as “things” which happen or “objects” which one can “have.” They belong to the much more mysterious realm of what one “is” – rather “who” one is. Aesthetic intuition is not merely the act of a faculty, it is also a heightening and intensification of our personal identity and being by the perception of our connatural affinity with “Being” in the beauty contemplated.⁵⁸

So the analogy here addresses the nature of a heightened sensibility that draws attention to a subjective notion of being. This statement of Merton’s highlights the ontological concerns (or his interpretation at least) of a theological interpretation of modern art.

Merton attempted to develop a religious aesthetics from his interest in art and theology, but according to Lawrence Cunningham, was unable to synthesise his wide-ranging interests.⁵⁹ Cunningham adds: “desire for religiously minimal art coincided with his own penchant for imageless contemplation, which at a certain level clashed with the more sacramental imagination of the liturgy.”⁶⁰ Merton’s interest in contemplative prayer in relation to abstract painting, also matched his love of and detailed

⁵⁵ Merton, *A Merton Concelebration*, ed. Deba Patnaik (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1981), 16, cited in O’Brien, “Tenebrae – Transfigured Night,” 31.

⁵⁶ O’Brien, “Tenebrae – Transfigured Night,” 31.

⁵⁷ Deba Patnaik, *A Merton Concelebration*, 16.

⁵⁸ From Merton, “Poetry and Contemplation” cited in *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Lawrence Cunningham, *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 72. One of the reasons Cunningham suggests for Merton’s standstill was the influence of a Cistercian sense of sparse and simple space.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

observations of the natural world, which like those of Gerard Manley Hopkins were not romanticised or sentimentalised, but grounded in specificity.⁶¹

Merton's views on the connection between religious experience and artistic contemplation is worth noting at this juncture, as his apophatic interests meet his interest in modern art. Reinhardt's work as "an artistic *via negative*"⁶² also includes Merton's idea of the relationship between contemplation and mystical experience. Merton (and Reinhardt) read Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), whose notion of connaturality, as a form of mysticism, also included associations with aesthetic appreciation. The relationship between aesthetic contemplation and mystical contemplation can also be understood indirectly through Maritain's term connaturality, which is ultimately a term employed to understand mystical relationship with God.

Maritain labels "mystical knowledge" as "negative theology," in the sense that it is understood as "*experimental* rather than propositional."⁶³ Curtis L. Hancock explains: "It is not a distant knowledge of God imperfectly attained through reflection on what concepts must be denied of him; instead it is an actual connaturality, a nonrational union of soul with deity itself."⁶⁴ Mysticism, as a direct and personal experience with God, is defined as "knowledge by connaturality that is strictly nonrational."⁶⁵ It is defined as apophatic in the sense that this knowledge does not come through the propositions of theological concepts. Aesthetic experience is also a form of "knowledge by connaturality" yet it is not synonymous with mysticism, which according to Maritain, is "the highest knowledge by connaturality."⁶⁶ As a "preconceptual" form of knowing, Hudson describes this aesthetic experience as the encounter of beauty in the world, or the encounter with God "as the ground and condition of beauty" through the creative or

⁶¹ Ibid., 71.

⁶² Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 85.

⁶³ Curtis L. Hancock "Maritain on Mystical Contemplation," in *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, ed. Deal Wyatt Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini, (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 260.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 258.

artistic endeavour.⁶⁷ The connatural mode of knowing only goes as far as beauty, but does not reach God.

Maritain is also a key figure with regard to the Romantic notion of the artist, and the modern turn to subjectivity. Maritain contributes to the notion of artistry as a reflection of divine activity, whereby, as William Dyrness puts it, “art-making is itself a (potentially) theological practice.”⁶⁸ One of the key ideas within this move, is Maritain’s notion of “connaturality,” as a function of art making,⁶⁹ whereby the creative process of the individual manifests within the work of art, through a fusion of subjectivity and the meaning of ‘things.’ In essence, this form of creativity reflects divine creation. For Maritain, just as “divine creation presupposes the knowledge God has of his own essence, poetic creation presupposes...a grasping, by the poet, of his own subjectivity, in order to create.”⁷⁰ Epistemologically, as Dyrness puts it, citing Maritain, “...the soul of the artist seeks itself by ‘communicating with things,’ effecting knowledge through ‘affective union.’”⁷¹

Merton affirmed Fr. M. Leonard’s view on the relationship between aesthetic and mystical experience which “pushes the dignity of the aesthetic intuition practically to its limit.”⁷² Within this view, “the intuition of the artist sets in motion the very same psychological processes which accompany infused contemplation.”⁷³ Yet Merton also acknowledged Maritain’s insistence on the remote relationship between the mystical and the aesthetic: “Its mode of apprehension is that of ‘connaturality’ – it reaches out to grasp the inner reality, the vital substance of its object, by a kind of affective

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 146. Maritain based his theories on medieval conceptualisations of beauty, when the reception theory of images was categorically inclusive and the “idea of knowing by making, which...continues the divine work of creation.” Ibid., 130. As Dyrness outlines it, Maritain’s Christological grounding places him within the fold of modern theology.

⁶⁹ See Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1954).

⁷⁰ Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 82 cited in Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 129.

⁷¹ Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 83 cited in Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 129.

⁷² Merton, “Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal,” in *Thomas Merton: Selected Essays*, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013) unpaginated. See, Fr. M. Leonard, E.J., “Art and Spirituality,” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Beauchesne, 1932-1995).

⁷³ Merton, “Poetry and Contemplation,” n.p.

identification of itself with it.”⁷⁴ Aesthetic experience, which has its basis in material reality, is a form of transcendence when considered through this analogous relationship: experience or knowledge that transcends material reality and the faculty of reason.⁷⁵

Merton also helps us to read Hotere in religious terms by positing the abstract monochrome as an aid for meditation. Through more explicit reference to religious liturgical tradition, Hotere’s works are distinguished from a commonly assumed disembodied and secular spiritual in art. Sometimes the symbolic looms large as the primary subject of the painting, in the case of a gold leaf Chi-Rho christogram which fills a tri-partitioned window frame, for example (ref. 44). Through the presence of religious motif and symbol, the acknowledgement of the wider discourse on the ‘the return of religion’ in art, has some traction.

The presence of liturgical narratives in Hotere’s work also calls for maintaining an interpretive balance so as not to overly state a religious intention and so distort a reading of the work. In my opinion, the formal elegance of Hotere’s works covers a multiple of interpretive sins, as it were. For example, the placement of the Chi-Rho within a three-part divided window frame, conveys religious symbolism: the monogram for Christ placed within the plane of black, and the three curved wooden arches allude to the symbolism of the trinity. But the formal qualities of the work are to be celebrated. The lines of the wooden frame bisect and run parallel to the gold typography, offsetting the curve of the frame. These elements exude a warmth against the depth of the black.

While, Merton’s theological aesthetics differ somewhat from his contributions to art historical discourse in the 1960s, he permits the inclusion of Catholic theological aesthetics within the interpretive endeavour. His interest in mystical theology also contributed towards the interpretive canon of abstract monochrome painting:

Striking like lightening to the quick of the real world
Scotus has mined all ranges to their deepest veins:
But where, oh, on what blazing mountain of theology

⁷⁴ Merton, “Poetry and Contemplation,” n.p.

⁷⁵ See Merton, “Poetry and Contemplation,” n.p. I stop short of debating the transcendental quality of beauty in the context of this study. While this notion grounds Maritain’s theology, working through the Thomist underpinning of this notion is not necessary for a reading of Hotere’s work.

And in what Sinai's furnace
Did God refine that gold?⁷⁶

Merton has been unfortunately described as “a poor man's Gerard Manley Hopkins,”⁷⁷ but his love of Hopkins presents a particular Catholic theological orientation. Merton was also influenced by Duns Scotus, whose name entitles the poem above. I include this excerpt from Merton's poem “Duns Scotus,” for the imagery of gold and flame that we also find in many of Hotere's *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* works. I read the flame, in this instance, as Merton's way of representing Scotus's notion of particularity. Mount Sinai also marks the germ of the traditions of negative theology, where Moses met God within a cloud of luminous darkness. This reading also marks a confluence of sensibilities, which Merton was engaged with, but is also characteristic of Hotere.

Synthesis

Modernist aesthetic contemplation maintains a subjectivity that is often understood as complicit with a disembodied form of spirituality. However, the multiplicity of interpretations of Hotere's spiritual sensibility works against this generalisation. Through considering the theoretical importance of conceiving aesthetics through the lens of relationality and materiality, an ethical imperative emerges.

Hotere's literary inclination supports a reading of his religious sensibility through the lens of material religion within a broader landscape of material culture. A liturgical analogy of the *Tenebrae* as a way of framing Hotere's *Lo Negro Lo Oro Sobre* series invites a participatory reading. The viewer's encounter is an embodied and affective engagement with the work, rather than a spiritually disembodied subjective experience.

Reading Hotere's modernist heritage alongside Māori narratives of cosmology and consciousness shifts the contours of interpretation again as an interconnected cosmos and notion of time sit at odds with neo-platonic Oneness. From one interpretive angle, Māori consciousness asks the reader to remain open to an interconnected relational

⁷⁶ “Duns Scotus,” in *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977), 164, cited in Paul Giles, *American Catholic Arts and Fictions: Culture, Ideology, Aesthetics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 191.

⁷⁷ Giles, *American Catholic Arts and Fictions*, 191.

paradigm. From another angle, if I was to pick up Taylor's notion of apophatic negation within Reinhardt interpretation and place it within a Hotere context, we might find it has a similar conceptual shape to a Māori interpretation of the cosmic process of existence. This comparison is obviously not one of conceptual similarity, but a thematic or rhetorical connection. Apophatic negation supports an understanding of the creation of the cosmos as a "prolonged process in which layers of reality gradually accumulate."⁷⁸ Māori understanding of the creation of the cosmos involves the long process of development from a world of nothingness, through darkness that emerges into light. This interpretative stance forefronts the idea that blackness is the remainder of a process of accumulation – the ground upon which the layers of reality are built. The Māori consciousness of Hotere's work, asks the reader to affirm a relational ontology.

Through Hotere, modernist contemplative practices, with the turn to the notion of the One, as a totality or a *seeming void*, meets a political and indigenous space. Rather than read Hotere through these differing compartments, I consider his work as a form of theopoetics. His works communicate a polyphilia: a range of theological, religious, indigenous, political and environmental associations and concerns that commune, reflect and refract within his frames. I undertake this approach with reference to Catherine Keller. She presents a way of thinking through a relation of difference between the apophatic and the relational. Steeped in more recent histories of relational theologies indebted to process theology of the Whiteheadian kind, feminisms of the 1980s, and political and ecological social and liberation theologies, she is a formative force within the practices of theopoetics. Keller's theopoetics is enabling and encouraging within the context of reading Hotere.

Theopoetic spiralling: the apophatic and the relational

Traditions of apophatic theology (including art world apophaticism) and an indigenous relationality converge in Hotere's work. Keller's "*apophatic theopoetics of relation*," introduces the possibility of reading apophaticism alongside relationality; two areas of theology that have not usually been associated with each other.⁷⁹ Keller's

⁷⁸ Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 86.

⁷⁹ Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 24.

contemplations, in her work entitled *The Cloud of the Impossible*, form an “interactive chiasmus” as she puts it.⁸⁰ Keller affirms “a certain apophatic depth [that] opens up *within* relationalism...And, conversely, a radical, indeed cosmological, relationalism will appear from within the apophatic, before and after its modernity.”⁸¹

Nicolas of Cusa’s “knowing ignorance” provides Keller a point of orientation for reading, “not just an apophatic panentheism, but the holographic vision of a radically interrelated universe.”⁸² For Keller, a “nonseparability” and “nonknowing” becomes an “*apophatic entanglement*...where knowledge, which happens only in and as relation, exposes its own *knowable* uncertainty.”⁸³ She traces a “lineage...for an apophatically entangled theology,” which includes relational theologies and the presence of, but not identification with, negative theology in continental philosophy.⁸⁴ Poststructuralism is not known for its interest in the relational, as Keller puts it: it is “disregarded, (as ontological, as metaphysical, as physical, as cosmological, as sentimental)...”⁸⁵ Yet through poststructuralism we find an iteration of, but not identification with, a contemporary turn to negative theology. The relation of the apophatic to deconstruction should not be measured as an “unconscious forerunner” (Jean-Luc Marion) but as Keller suggests, a “strategic entanglement.”⁸⁶ Keller’s “*apophatic theopoetics of relation*,” opens a space for reading Hotere’s work that permits divergent critical interpretations to become entangled in a non-contradictory fashion.

Keller traces ruptures of the apophatic within the relational. For example, she finds the “role of *not-knowing as respect for difference*,” within the Brazilian sister Ivone Gebra’s Roman Catholic feminism and “indigenously tinged relationalism,” as affirmed

⁸⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 89.

⁸³ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 71. To illustrate this in-comparison, she cites Kevin Hart (“deconstruction is not negative theology, but negative theology is deconstruction”), naming negative theology as “indeconstructible—inasmuch as it subverts every theological construction.” Ibid. For Keller, “...deconstruction cannot be identified with negative theology, which remains, after all, theology, indeed a theology indebted to the Neoplatonic One—of which poststructuralism is having *none*. Deconstruction is heir to the legacy of the death of God, the God of ontotheology whose Being *is* that One.” Ibid., 8.

by Gebra within her work with the community of “favelas of Recife.”⁸⁷ Conversely, the relational is also found within the apophatic. Keller locates in Nicolas of Cusa, a “*theological cosmology of relation*,” as a “haunting foldover” in her contemplation on a “*coincidentia oppositorum* of deconstructive negation and affirmative interrelation...”⁸⁸

For Hotere, the apophatic can be read within his political and environmental works where the notion of the ‘other’ takes form in socio-cultural or ecological terms and “*not-knowing as respect for difference*”⁸⁹ could read as a guiding principle. On the other hand, traditions of negative theology that form the lineage of art world apophaticisms can be shown to present a relational paradigm for reading Hotere. This emerges within notions of perception also attached to the tradition of religious art. For example, the logic of the icon also finds its way down the line to the modernist abstract monochrome. A relational paradigm also emerges if the notion of religion resists a disembodied understanding of the divine. The viewer’s encounter with the material and literary qualities of Hotere’s art invite the viewer to participate within the work itself.

In Cusa, Keller finds a “participatory ontology” within a relationally defined notion of perception, interconnected with Cusa’s *docta ignorantia*.⁹⁰ Cusa’s work *De visione Dei*, had an accompanying painting, an icon of the 15th Century, intended as a “sensible experiment,” or spiritual exercise for a community of believers.⁹¹ Here, icon logic is transposed within the frame of three-dimensional perspective. It was an “all-seeing” painting that locked eyes upon, and followed the gaze of each individual viewer, even in a collective setting.⁹² As an exercise in divine perception, Cusa writes, “You, Lord, see all things and each single thing at the same time. You are moved with all that are moved and stand with all that stand.”⁹³ Cusa refers to the “Pauline figure of the face,” as Keller

⁸⁷ Ibid., 37. Sallie McFague’s ecofeminist panentheism was also an influence for Gebra.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 95.

⁹¹ Ibid., 87.

⁹² Ibid., 88.

⁹³ Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei*, in *Nicolas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. by H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist, 1997), 242, in Ibid., 98.

puts it, “that face seen in Corinthians ‘in a mirror, an enigma.’”⁹⁴ Reflective imagery meets the cloud of unknowing in Cusa’s expression:

This cloud, mist, darkness, or ignorance into which whoever seeks your face enters when one leaps beyond every knowledge and concept is such that below it your face cannot be found except veiled.⁹⁵

The mirrored surfaces of Hotere’s work also support the notion of a participatory ontology as the viewer encounters herself and others within the work. The same logic applies. Perception meets apophaticism within the misty dark mirrored surface of the work and the viewer caught within the grip of the painting: “You, Lord, see all things and each single thing at the same time. You are moved with all that are moved and stand with all that stand.”⁹⁶

For Keller, Cusa’s contemplative logic of the painting, (“its eyes move with your movement”), is a dynamic that “...oscillates tonally between the poles of the cool cosmological speculation of the polymath and the heat of apophatic eros,” and takes the viewer “into the cloud: a cloud painted with the dark brilliance of the Dionysian lineage.”⁹⁷ In addition, she continues, this “experiment in perspective” is a location for negative theology “to unfold the positive materiality of the universe.”⁹⁸ Keller writes,

Let me suggest that from this apophasis unfolds, becomes explicit, a radical relationality, and so the relativity of perspectivism, that was gestating in apophatic theology all along. For perspective is nothing other than a view. A point of view only exists as one among many. So it may affirm its own perspective only relatively, only in relation. Perspective casts the shadow of its own possible negation. Affirmative relationality unfolds from negative theology

⁹⁴ Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 92.

⁹⁵ Cusa, *De visione Dei*, 244, in *Ibid.*, 92.

⁹⁶ Cusa, *De visione Dei*, 242, in *Ibid.*, 98.

⁹⁷ Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 88, 97, 88.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

as the fold, angle, or—in Cusa’s language—contraction, that is perspective itself.⁹⁹

The Māori consciousness of Hotere’s work introduces an indigenous relational paradigm to the interpretation of his work, but there is also an inherent relationalism attached to the viewer’s encounter that has early modern roots. Here also, the mirror play dovetails with the narrative of St John of the Cross discussed in an earlier chapter. St John of the Cross marks the intensity of poetic language as a site for reading Hotere’s work in terms of an apophatic aesthetics. Through a literary reading of the Song of Songs, the mirror of the Sacred Heart is a “complex organ of mystical reception,”¹⁰⁰ and “an ever-changing, infinite mirror of God.”¹⁰¹ This mirroring language of love is reflected not only within this emblem that Hotere readily employed throughout his oeuvre, but is extended within the luminous darkness of his surfaces. Hotere’s placement of the Sacred Heart within his environmental works, also affirms a connectedness between the divine in this interpretive context: the “*coincidentia oppositorum* of Earth and Heaven.”¹⁰² Interpreting Hotere through St John of the Cross alongside Cusa, places emphasis on understanding the connection between the divine and the world beyond an anthropology of the self.

The imagery of the *luminous darkness* of negative theology, has roots in a 4th Century Cappadocian exegesis of the Exodus narrative when Moses approaches the mountain upon which God descends: “Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the dark cloud where God was.”¹⁰³ Keller defines negative theology as: “the way of negating in speech that which can be said of an excess, the infinity that escapes speech.”¹⁰⁴ But, as she mines for relationality, she continues,

⁹⁹ Keller also cites Karsten Harries, “for whom the Cusan infinite is key to the emergence of a modern or indeed postmodern perspectivism, argues, the ‘doctrine of learned ignorance—on which, as he himself says, his cosmological speculations depend—is inseparable from this principle of perspective. To become learned about one’s ignorance is to become learned about the extent to which what we took to be knowledge is subject to the distorting power of perspective.’” Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 43, in *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰⁰ Luce López-Baralt, “The Heart or *Qalb*,” n.p.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Exodus 20:21 cited in Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 51.

¹⁰⁴ Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 17.

...these mystical negations do not, contrary to a standard reading, simply bow to an ineffable and transcendent absolute, absolved of all relation. If they did, the mystic would have...nothing to say. Exceeding language in language, negative theology positively glows with relation. Even at its most Neoplatonic early pitch, the divinity ‘is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things.’¹⁰⁵ These relations exceed their world even as they reconstitute it. But they could never quite materialize as an explicated relational ontology within the classical terms of substance metaphysics.¹⁰⁶

In Cusa, the apophatic and the kataphatic are not balancing forces, (for “in theology negations are true and affirmations are inadequate”¹⁰⁷), but elicit a “mutual enfolding in the *coincidentia oppositorum*.”¹⁰⁸ Cusa represents the birth of the modern mind, according to Alejandro García-Rivera, dislodging the relation between heaven and earth as “a spiritual anagogical ‘ladder’ leading to the divine [and where] analogy and anagogy did not do justice to the absolute unknowability proper to the Infinite God...”¹⁰⁹ Cusa represents a specific change within the histories of apophatic aesthetics.

The language of negative theology betrays a relationality. Keller names an apophatic panentheism with its source in a beguiled divine: “the silhouette of an apophatic relationalism begins to appear, it seems, where the negation of the negation of divine love folds the distance of its transcendence into intimacy.”¹¹⁰ “Eros [becomes]... apophatic,” as Keller puts it, citing Charles Stang to make her point: “Eros is the engine of apophasis, a yearning that stretches language to the point that it breaks, stretches the

¹⁰⁵ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. by Colm Luibheid (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1987), 82, in *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Cusa in *Ibid.*, 93

¹⁰⁸ Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 93.

¹⁰⁹ Alejandro García-Rivera, “Aesthetics” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, MA, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 355.

¹¹⁰ Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 76.

lover to the point that he splits.”¹¹¹ She reiterates the contrast between the literary language of love within apophaticism, and neo-platonic tradition:

If we can embrace this insight—that the very desire that drives us in and beyond speech, and that in this eros we are iterating and exercising the love that always already exceeds us—no paternalism of the distant and dysrelational transcendence can long remain erect upon the Neoplatonic peak.¹¹²

The affirmation of relationality in this context, also supports a re-reading of the traditional assumption attached to modernist abstract apophaticism. The abstract monochrome which upheld notions of the sublime, of a transcendence that was void of things relational, finds new traction through Cusa. While Keller offers a new reading, artists of twentieth century abstraction also showed an interest in Cusa. For example, museum director James Johnson Sweeney described modernist abstract painting as “*coincidentia oppositorum*...a visible microcosmic representation of larger macrocosmic unities...”¹¹³ This concept is easily translatable within the visual presentation of an abstract picture plane. Tàpies can also be cited here, as he named the artist or the poet as the most suitable enabler of this paradigm.

In addition to the apophatic tradition within the abstract monochrome, we find a nondualist Eastern paradigm. Here Merton again provides a synthesis, with his interest in Zen Buddhism in dialogue with Western apophatic theologies. Cusa’s coincidence of opposites finds a parallel in the notion of *prajna* as awareness, within the language of the One, Zero and infinity; (a visual language readily employed by Hotere throughout his oeuvre). The “*prajna*-wisdom of the Unconscious” is “attained” in an all-encompassing “realization...beyond subject and object” relations within

¹¹¹ Charles M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: 'No Longer I'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 170f, in *Ibid.*, 76.

¹¹² Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 76.

¹¹³ Marcia Brennan, *Curating Consciousness: Mysticism and the Modern Museum* (MIT Press, 2010), 20. For Sweeney, the relation between the “physical and the spiritual” is described by the notion of an “apophatic body,” as Brennan puts it, “a surface that materializes through its own dematerialization, thereby saying its own unsaying as numinous corporeal presence arises from the corresponding depths of its own dissolving absence.” *Ibid.*, 99. See also Paul Wember, “Alberto Burri” in Christov-Bakargiev and Tolomeo, *Burri: 1915 – 1995 Retrospective*, 277-278 in *Ibid.*, 237.

consciousness.¹¹⁴ “In such realization,” as Merton puts it, “evidently ‘emptiness’ is no longer opposed to ‘fullness’, but emptiness and fullness are One. Zero equals infinity.”¹¹⁵ In comparison with Cusa, Merton continues:

since the infinite is all, it has no opposite and no contrary. It is at once the maximum and the minimum, and is the perfect coincidence of all contraries. Hence it explodes the Aristotelian principle of contradiction. Nicholas of Cusa, like the Zen masters, affirms and denies the same thing at the same *time*, when speaking of the infinite. For him, admission of the coincidence of opposites is the ‘starting point of the ascension to mystical theology’.¹¹⁶

Merton also places St John of the Cross alongside certain Zen Buddhist concepts that assist in interpreting the abstract monochrome. “On a psychological level,” for Merton, “there is an exact correspondence between the mystical night of St John of the Cross and the emptiness of *sunyata*.”¹¹⁷ He elaborates:

The difference is theological: the night of St John opens into a divine and personal freedom and is a gift of ‘grace’. The void of Zen is the natural ground of Being – for which no theological explanation is either offered or desired. In either case, however, whether in attaining to the pure consciousness of Zen or in passing through the dark night of St John of the Cross, there must be a ‘death’ of that ego-identity or self-consciousness which is constituted by a calculating and desiring ego.”¹¹⁸

In all accounts pure negation is not a guiding principle; neither of the void of Zen Buddhism, nor negative theology. Zen Buddhist enlightenment seeks “the resolution of all subject-object relationships and oppositions in a pure void [and as] an immediate grasp of being in its ‘suchness’ and ‘thusness’”, as Merton writes.¹¹⁹ For him, both Zen Buddhism and western mysticism, dispose of the idea of a metaphysical system.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Merton, “Zen” in *Thomas Merton on ZEN* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), 17.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138n10.

¹¹⁷ Merton, “The Zen Koan,” in *Thomas Merton on ZEN*, 76.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 76 -77.

¹¹⁹ Merton, “Zen,” 2-3.

So, the apophaticism of modernism might find renewed interpretive verve, encompassing a more interconnected worldview through Hotere's work. In addition to the implicit relationalism found within traditions of apophaticism, and the nondualist (and orientalist) reforming of this tradition in twentieth century art, we find the presence of a Māori indigenous ontology. Hotere's spiritual sensibility contributes towards an ecologically orientated vision of the world.

The ethical implications of a relationally defined apophaticism and an apophatically defined relationalism is salient. The relational ontology inherent within Māori consciousness also supports a relational ethics. Aesthetic contemplation becomes a participatory ontology. Hotere's work can be read as a testament to the concerns we have with the relational systems of the planet, through an embodied and relational envisioning of ourselves within the complex systems of our universe. Hotere's more explicit political and environmental concerns are supported by a deeper relational ethics and ontology found within the traditions of apophatic theology and indigenous ontology. Through a re-reading of the theological and spiritual traditions that form part of the conceptual paradigm of abstract modernist monochrome painting, the interpretive reception of his work finds current ethical and ecological relevance.

Conclusions

Through the attempt to add to the critical reception of Hotere's work, this chapter has explored theological and art historical material pertaining to the religious content in Hotere literature. Hotere's works, as objects for visual meditation, also provide the reader with rich heritages of interpretation. Hotere's works as expressions of an 'apophatic theopoetics of relation' explore the possibility of synthesising key components of the rich spiritual and religious traditions that can be interpreted within his oeuvre.

Catholic theological aesthetics might be more readily available to engage with modern art and there are clear avenues in Hotere's oeuvre for this. Yet Hotere arguably works within a broader scope. His work demonstrates an intertextuality. It is lyrical, and its self-reflexivity invites and includes the participation of the viewer and the location of

the everyday. A connection between art and life is affirmed through a relational and material approach to his work. His collaborative endeavours offer transpositions between different ways of knowing – we hear colours and see sounds – from which another form of material language for a spiritual sensibility emerges. Here knowing happens through relation, and through the body, as sense perception, implicit within the definition of aesthetics. Aesthetics is defined in terms of a relational and embodied experience. The relational character of materiality itself shifts the paradigm of interpretation away from a disembodied notion of mediation of the divine through art.

The question of whether the abstract monochrome is representative of the thesis or antithesis of the ontotheological gesture can only be glanced at here. I have deliberately avoided a direct engagement with ontotheological debates that might distract from the specifics of Hotere's art which both affirms and disrupts this tradition. While the Romantic heritage of modern abstract monochromes is indebted to a metaphysical framework that is characteristically ontotheological, (see Mark C. Taylor), I argue that Hotere's work engenders an ontological ambiguity. This interpretation of the abstract monochrome enables both a framework for seeking knowledge of the divine through a rational metaphysical paradigm, yet at the same time it disrupts this notion through an apophatic aesthetic, Eastern Buddhist traditions, and in Hotere's case, the prevalence of poetic texts and his Māori consciousness.

I did not want to distract from an examination of Hotere's position by getting embroiled in traditions of theological debate at large. Hotere's work is too rich with spiritual and religious interpretive directions to maintain a single systematic thread. The theological departure points have been governed by what I have found in Hotere's art. Theology can help us understand the conceptual histories attached to the development of modern art. But here I emphasise the way Hotere invites the viewer to participate in a theopoetic through attention to the multiple associations that his work presents.

I argue that the plurality of Hotere's artistic vision unintentionally disrupts the metaphysical emphasis on a transcendent flight towards the Absolute. The view of art as

“an object of visual meditation,”¹²⁰ places Hotere within a modernist romantic heritage. Baker’s assertion that Hotere’s black paintings “have a spiritual dimension in the same way that Reinhardt’s works have a spiritual dimension,”¹²¹ is only true in part, as the presence of the Māori worldview radically redefines the ontological underpinning of this modernist heritage, through positing an intimate connection between divine and material reality.

Highlighting a tendency among modern artists to dissolve the divide between art and life, or between spirituality and everyday life, this study emphasises an embodied approach to interpretation that affirms a non-dualist comprehension of the art work. An inherent relationality emerges as a governing principle:

Nothing in other words is known outside of relation—whether of terror, tedium, or love. Nothing knowable comes constructed *ex nihilo*, void of context. If something is known at all, it cannot be absolved of relation; therefore nothing is known ab-solutely. Not God, not me, not you, not truth, not justice, not Earth, not flesh, not photon. Each is what it is only in relation to its others.¹²²

Lastly, I reiterate the way Hotere’s works participate with “a darkness common to all humanity”¹²³ in their manner of communication. Hotere’s religious sensibility is ultimately grounded in his generative capacity as an artist who made work, as elegies or prayers, *for* and *with* the world.

¹²⁰ Hotere, *Zero, an exhibition of paintings*, n.p., in Khan, “Figuring Desire,” 119.

¹²¹ Baker, “A World of Black and Light,” 116.

¹²² Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 20.

¹²³ O’Brien, *Hotere: Out the Black Window*, 117.

JOANNA MARGARET PAUL

CHAPTER SEVEN

The artistic and spiritual sensibility of Joanna Margaret Paul

Introduction: a painter/poet of the everyday

This study focuses on the Aotearoa New Zealand painter/poet Joanna Margaret Paul, through the lens of her religious intuitions and theological reflections and in her commitment to a multidisciplinary art practice that was grounded in everyday life. I focus on Paul's orientation of vision which exhibits a visual and literary sensibility that engendered a notion of enchantment through attentive engagement with the everyday. In her life and art she maintained an eco-orientated ethical outlook, drawing from the worlds of literature, science and theological tradition to state her position.

In this chapter I provide an overview of Paul's art historical context: I review her practice as a painter/poet of the everyday, her connection to the women's art movement, her association with religious tradition, her use of white as an intimation of the spiritual in art, and her relationally defined spiritual disposition. In a second chapter, I conduct a reading of Paul's work that integrates and contextualises these findings. I undertake a reading of her spiritual sensibility that first emphasises the relational poetics of her practice, and second, her phenomenology of white space. I conclude by considering her work as a form of theopoetics that integrates her spiritual sensibility in terms of a relational theology; a "personal meditation on the mysteries" of the divine.¹

Paul was born in 1945, to booksellers and publishers Blackwood and Janet Paul. She graduated in English and Philosophy from the University of Auckland in 1968, and then in Fine Arts from Elam School of Art in 1969. She married the painter Jeffery Harris, and they had three children. Paul and Harris separated in 1984. Interest in Paul's work as a multidisciplinary artist has gained traction in recent years. Upon her untimely death in 2003, she left over a thousand pieces of art: in oil, water colour, drawing, photography and (Super 8) film, and a significant contribution of poetry and prose, much of it unpublished in her life time. She was widely read, preferring philosophy or

¹ Joanna Margaret Paul, "New Forms in Christian Art," interview by Ella Robertson, tape recording, Whanganui 25 June, 1998.

theology, and politically active in matters that were important to her, architectural conservation and environmentalism, for example. These engagements found expression in her modes of art making.

The idea of a solitary studio-based painter striving for a vision of transcendence, through fashioning great works of art, was antithetical to Paul. In an exhibition statement she made in 1975, she writes,

In my work, I'm dealing with repositories of life, where it's lived. I'm painting things like the coffee cups after a visitor has left. I am trying to capture an idea from life, pursuing it in a poem or a painting or a collage or a photograph. The sitting room is, in effect, my studio. Not only do I rarely set things up, I paint at close range, resting my watercolour paper on the same table as I am painting. Working quickly on a small scale has meant I've often used watercolour or gouache on paper, a medium that's considered second-rate and minor these days, [I am] aggressively in support of the 'minor'.²

Paul eschewed the categorisation of her art under traditional conventions of still-life or portrait painting, stating: "I don't like to actually put up a 'still life' but because I'm working with my children and with the house and garden I'm surrounded by the web of living and simply try to isolate something from the continuum."³ Paul did not deal with the representation of objects in the everyday, but worked through a way of mediating everyday life: a phenomenological approach that finds expression through an engagement with the "inexhaustible" variation in her surroundings (see ref. 45, fig. 9).⁴ She writes of working with the objects that

were part of the fabric (red & green) of sensual maternal domestic life: the light shining through the jam in a jar; the toys on the floor, the plum tree the blue

² Gregory O'Brien, "Joanna Margaret Paul: Beyond Sensation" in O'Brien, *Land and Deeds: Profiles of New Zealand Contemporary Painters* (Auckland: Godwit Publishing, 1996), 68.

³ Joanna Margaret Paul, "Web of Living: Joanna Paul, this year's Frances Hodgkins's Fellow," interviewed by Jocelyn Brown, in *Critic*, vol. 59, no. 21 (September 27, 1983), n.p.

⁴ Paul elaborates on perception: "How we see what we see...the subtle changes of colour or linear direction yielded to an intent gaze, and then what happens when one turns one's head – never cease to interest me. The visual world is inexhaustible." Foreword, *Joanna Margaret Paul Chronicle/Chronology* (Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, 1989), 5.

Echium always through the confining lattice of window or verandah. I was surrounded by beauty.⁵

Paul was a prolific maker, who with the “interconnectedness...of a visual imagination,”⁶ moved around her chosen subject matter with a variety of mediums. Paul writes of turning to poetry when she was unable to approach her subject matter through visual means, and vice versa.⁷ Paul writes that through the activity of switching between mediums or “...by constantly changing one’s lens, one sharpens awareness of the given medium; medium becomes subject.”⁸ She often worked with the tensions between written word and visual image: carefully chosen juxtapositions of single words, or transcribed poetry or prose of writers who appealed to her, with a liking for Greek and Latin (see ref. 46, fig. 10). With regard to “this process of transference and reorganisation of objects, or words” Tony Bellette remarks on the art historical significance of Paul’s multidisciplinary mode of working, stating: “In New Zealand art we have not before, I think, seen such a parallel development of forms, each true to itself yet linked to the other in its essential method.”⁹

Paul’s art historical influences and visual genealogy included figures such as Georgia O’Keeffe,¹⁰ Giorgio Morandi, Paul Cézanne and Pierre Bonnard, and she also mentioned the artists, Edward Hopper and Johannes Vermeer.¹¹ Paul’s mother, also a painter, was an influential figure who taught her how to see. Very much informed by modernism, Paul writes of “[feeling] Cézanne as an influence sucked dry.”¹² Other important influences were New Zealand painters Rita Angus (1908-1970), Frances Ellis

⁵ Paul, “from Rooms and Episodes: 2 - Written at St Omer,” in *brief 32 Joanna Margaret Paul*, ed. Jack Ross (May 2005): 51.

⁶ Paul, interview by Lita Barrie, cassette recording, New Zealand, 1984. Retrieved from the *Women’s Art Archive*, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. “...interconnectedness...of a visual imagination” was Barrie’s phrase that Paul affirmed.

⁷ Paul writes: “Writing poetry can be a shorthand way of describing. I often use poetry to say something I can’t talk about in paint – to look at an event, a movement, a tone of voice, something not entirely understood.” Paul in O’Brien, “Beyond Sensation,” 71.

⁸ Paul, “Joanna Paul: Shibusha,” *Cantrills Filmnotes* 47-48 (August 1985): 10.

⁹ Tony Bellette, “Joanna Paul: Words and Pictures” in *Art New Zealand* 26 (Autumn 1983): 45.

¹⁰ Paul admired the way O’Keeffe framed her compositions, that in her words, did not only depict flowers but would “become flowers.” Paul, “Web of Living,” n.p.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Paul in Joanna Paul and Allie Eagle “Letters from Room to Room,” in *A Women’s Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* ed. Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie and Tilly Lloyd (Wellington: Government Printing Office, 1988), 95.

(1900-1977), and expatriate artist Frances Hodgkins (1869-1947). Paul appreciated the way Hodgkins, “kept colour line & tone distinct, allowing full play to their energies...& her peculiarly female domestication of the landscape thru a window.”¹³ There is also a self-portrait work that Paul made which reads as a tribute to Hodgkins. Hodgkins made a work entitled *Self Portrait: Still Life* (1941, ref. 47, fig. 11) that detailed various elements from her everyday life. Paul takes Hodgkins’s notion of the everyday with a dash of humour, depicting a dish-rack of drying dishes (ref. 48, fig. 12). I read this as an expression of a non-romanticised reality of everyday living.

Paul’s artistic influences also crossed disciplines. She often stated that she was more inspired by music than visual art.¹⁴ As Gregory O’Brien puts it: “...she belonged to the musical school of the painter Frances Hodgkins, to which might be added the painterly school of Claude Debussy, [or Franz Schubert or Oliver Messiaen] and the theological school of film maker Robert Bresson.”¹⁵

Paul mentioned a trip to Europe that she took “at the impressionable age of 18,” as a time that sparked an “intense responsiveness to the visual world” that never left her.¹⁶ From that time on she was to conduct an art practice that sought to manage or “filter” the world as it confronted her.¹⁷ This emotional visual responsiveness, that she later labelled her responsibility to the world, also engendered an ethical and spiritual attitude towards her material environment.¹⁸

Another chronological period that informed her disposition as a poet/painter of the everyday was her association with the women’s art movement in the 1970s. While Paul

¹³ Paul in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 92. Paul wrote on Frances Hodgkins’s “magic casement” motif: “a disjunction between foreground and background that refuses to make sense spatially, creating a sense of a shifting and unstable reality.” Paul, “Frances Hodgkins,” *Craccum*, vol. 43, no. 12 (25 September 1969): 9. Jill Trevelyan compares this quality to Paul’s work where, “inanimate objects also assume an unpredictable life of their own.” Jill Trevelyan “The Drawing of Joanna Margaret Paul,” in Jill Trevelyan and Sarah Treadwell, *Joanna Margaret Paul: Drawing* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006), 18.

¹⁴ See Paul, “Web of Living,” n.p.

¹⁵ Gregory O’Brien, ““Always quartettish thoughts”” in *beauty, even: Joanna Margaret Paul, 1945 – 2003*, ed. Enna (Wellington: Wellington City Gallery, 2004), 31. Paul herself mentioned Bresson as being a particular influence. See Paul, “On Not Being a Catholic Writer,” in *The Source of the Song: New Zealand Writers on Catholicism*, ed. Mark Williams (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995), 134.

¹⁶ Paul, interview by Barrie, n.p.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

expressed a reservation towards feminism, referring to herself as a “dissident feminist” and “unwilling postmodernist”¹⁹ her work can be considered within the bounds of a cultural feminism and postmodernism. Feminist art practices sought the breaking down of hierarchical art historical boundaries. Paul’s multidisciplinary practice, and her appreciation for so called lesser art forms like watercolour, affirmed a feminist positioning, yet her work was not overtly political.

Biographer and art writer Jill Trevelyan writes of Paul’s position within “an essentially feminine artistic tradition,” (with the likes of Frances Hodgkins and Virginia Woolf as preeminent influences in Paul’s life work).²⁰ Trevelyan takes note of the stark difference between Paul’s work and the overt political work being made by other female artists in the 1970s. Trevelyan writes, that it was “her quiet assertion of female difference and...her sustained exploration of female subjectivity,”²¹ which carried the voice of her political positioning.²² Along these lines, Peter Ireland locates the “apogee of Paul’s political activism” within her attentiveness to the world, stating, in “being alive *to* the world...she signals...the exhilarating need to re-make the present *in* the present...”²³

The feminist phrase and notion, ‘the personal is political,’ supported Paul’s interests as an artist. While she stressed the personal,²⁴ she has also been cited as exemplifying this political position. Within this context, the way Paul worked with and through her material surroundings in everyday life, was also an avenue of religious intuition. Paul’s spiritual outlook finds connection with the art historical legitimisation of an everyday aesthetics.

Paul worked at an art historical juncture that was both indebted to the modernism of her mother’s generation, and at the same time, engaged with a generation of women artists

¹⁹ Paul, “MIDNIGHT NOTES of a DISSIDENT FEMINIST / & UNWILLING POST MODERNIST” (Unpublished notes. MS-Papers-9473. Paul, Joanna, 1945-2003: Papers. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand).

²⁰ Paul’s friend poet Bernadette Hall writes, “There was something patrician in her stance. She reminded me of Virginia Woolf in appearance and in her art practise,” Bernadette Hall, Email correspondence with the author, March 2015.

²¹ Trevelyan, “The Drawing of Joanna Margaret Paul,” 20.

²² Ibid.

²³ Peter Ireland, “A Shape to Part the Space: Joanna Margaret Paul (1945-2003)” in *Art New Zealand* 108 (Spring, 2003): 97.

²⁴ Bridie Lonie emphasised this point to me.

who marked a significant shift within the art historical landscape. She is currently being recognised as a pioneering artist within Aotearoa New Zealand. Her practice as a filmmaker was particularly innovating, and her multidisciplinary activity makes her unique within Aotearoa New Zealand art history.

Paul and the women's art movement

Paul participated in *an exhibition of six women artists* in 1975, curated by pioneering second wave lesbian separatist feminist Allie Eagle.²⁵ This show was one of the first public iterations of cultural feminist concerns in New Zealand. Paul's exhibition statement went as follows:

As a woman painting is not a job, not even a vocation. It is part of life, subject to the strains, and joys, of domestic life. I cannot paint unless the house is in order. Unless I paint I don't function well in my domestic roles. Each thing is important. The idea that one sacrifices other values for art is alien to me, and I think to all women whose calling it is to do and be many things. To concentrate all meaning and all energy in a work of art is to leave life dry and banal. I don't wish to separate the significant and everyday actions but to bring them as close as possible together. It is natural for women to do this; their exercise and their training and their artistry is in daily living. Painting for me as a woman is an ordinary act—about the great meaning in ordinary things. Anonymity pattern utility quietness relatedness.²⁶

While Paul later considered herself a “dissident feminist”²⁷ or a “lower case feminist”²⁸ her involvement in the early days of the women's art movement was formative. Marian Evans indicated that without Paul's encouragement she would not have gone on to initiate, along with others, platforms for feminist connectivity and activity. Evans writes:

²⁵ *An exhibition of six women artists*, ed. Alison Mitchell [Allie Eagle] (Christchurch: Robert McDougal Gallery, 1975).

²⁶ Paul, “Women as Artists,” from *An exhibition of six women artists*, 12-13, cited in *Spiral* 1 (1976): 41.

²⁷ Paul, “MIDNIGHT NOTES of a DISSIDENT FEMINIST,” n.p.

²⁸ Paul writes, “I don't think I am a feminist artist / at best or at worst - a lower case feminist.” Paul, “Illustrated talk on being a feminist artist” Unpublished notes. MS-Papers-9473-114. Paul, Joanna, 1945-2003: Papers. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

I've concluded that the concepts Joanna's note articulates became so important to me because they came from an experience not unlike my own. I read the note then, and read it now, as a kind of manifesto. Understood the longing for an integrated life that it expressed, and its resistance to the obsessive commitment to making art—perhaps more common among men than women—that is often costly to family life, especially when the art-making generates little money...²⁹

Bridie Lonie confirms Paul's initiative, in a concise overview of what this position meant for artists:

It made possible the reinvention of traditional women's art-forms: the still life, the view from the window, the flower painting. It encouraged the idea of art as a "practice" – a constant activity but pragmatic, contained within the parameters of daily life. It discouraged the single-minded pursuit of an intellectual idea and the personal ruthlessness that can be necessary for this. Instead, artists worked with the stories that attach themselves to images, and vice-versa, fragments of sensory experience, connections drawn between ideas and things.³⁰

Paul invited a number of women to participate in a group exhibition entitled *A Season's Diaries* in 1977. This show sought the integration of art and everyday life, through the exhibition of lived experience in the form of a diary. Paul's brief for the participating artists included the call: "to find a form to fit the changes of each day."³¹ Lonie wrote an anonymous synopsis of the project, "Diary of a Season," describing the diarist format where surfaces were laid out like a calendar and "No day was to be documented except on that day, but each square was to contain at least one element that was continuous with the previous day and at least one that was new."³² Paul's exhibition statement, reproduced above, concludes Lonie's review, referencing a motivating factor for the format of the project, and perhaps the importance of Paul's reflection for other artists, as a kind of manifesto. Evans expresses her gratitude to Paul for introducing a format upon

²⁹ Marian Evans, "Development: Opening space for New Zealand women's participation in scriptwriting for feature films?" (PhD diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2010), 27-28.

³⁰ Bridie Lonie, "Joanna Paul, a view from here" in *beauty, even*, 26.

³¹ [Lonie] "Diary of a Season: A Proposal for a Women's exhibition," *Landfall* 32 (1978): 63.

³² [Lonie citing Paul], "Diary of a Season," 63.

which she launched her “creative practice,” and, which she writes, “...was also the beginning, for [her], of consciousness-raising that developed theory from experience.”³³

A Season's Diaries was one of the first projects that drew women together with similar concerns – an initial gathering force for the women's art movement in New Zealand. Evans considers Paul's participation in the “Women's Environment” at the Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery in Christchurch, in 1977, as potentially influencing her ideas for *A Season's Diaries*.³⁴ Reiterating the political importance of working through a connectivity between art and life, Heather McPherson stated the intention of the “Women's Environment” was “to transform the existing gallery spaces...[to] make a statement about our art, its processes and everyday environment, which are barely separable.”³⁵ Evans draws a connection between the words with which Paul concluded her initial statement (‘anonymity pattern utility quietness relatedness’) with compositional and formal qualities that make up artistic and writing practices, as also having an influence on Paul's initiative for *A Season's Diaries*.³⁶ These qualities also exhibit something of postmodernist concerns, as Evans writes: “*A Season's Diaries* arguably incorporated some of the tenets of postmodernism, particularly destabilised distinctions between high and low culture, and competing narratives, none claiming any greater veracity than others.”³⁷ Trevelyan lists the devices Paul employed and the stances she took that position her within these early expressions of postmodernism: her feminist and environmental allegiances, her multidisciplinary approach to practice, her incorporated use of language, of text, and her preference for unconventional approaches to compositional “framing” devices.³⁸

Paul's sensibility was also worked through the relationships between word and image in her work. Lonie writes of Paul's use of text and image as maintaining political import in the manner “they balance fact and feeling... [Paul] learnt to use these to make political and ethical points from the position of someone for whom an ethic of everyday

³³ Evans, “Development,” 32.

³⁴ One of Paul's inspirations for *A Season's Diaries* was apparently her reading of “The Pillowbook of Sei Shonagan.” Trevelyan, “To see the moment is to farewell it,” 20.

³⁵ McPherson, *Spiral 3* (1978): 24, in Evans, “Development,” 33.

³⁶ Evans, “Development,” 28.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁸ Trevelyan, “To see the moment is to farewell it,” 21.

attentiveness to value mattered most.”³⁹ Bernadette Hall, when considering a political certitude in the “visual power and linguistic reach” of Paul’s use of text, draws a comparison with Hotere and McCahon, considering their work as “male/female sides of [the same] coin.”⁴⁰ A comparison with these artists also highlights the distinctiveness of Paul’s spiritual disposition. Paul’s work reveals a resistance to the Romantic notion of the artist as genius. Paul likened McCahon’s use of “the word as a symbol” in the way “his very handwriting was like shaping up the light...dark words against the light, and the light always being brightest against the dark, and so on...”⁴¹ In contrast, she saw her words as “lighter and more playful...”⁴² preferring the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay, and the subtle influence of Chinese calligraphy.⁴³ Her use of language elicits an intellectual and perceptual sense of traditions of relation between word and image, couched within a subjective and understated style.

A penultimate example of her use of word and image is her 1977 work *Unpacking the Body*. In response to the death of Paul’s second child Imogen Rose, she produced two seminal works: a series of poems entitled *Imogen*,⁴⁴ and an installation, *Unpacking the Body*, that was exhibited in the “Women’s Environment,” and later published in book form (see ref. 49, fig. 13 and ref. 50, fig. 14).⁴⁵ This latter work was an etymological and object-based inventory of medical terminology in relation to the anatomy of the human body, domestic objects and things in nature. She placed white painted objects within pink frames. It was an important work in that it bridged a divide between poetry and visual art, and as an interrogation of language, approached a form of deconstruction. It was also an incredibly personal iteration of Paul’s idea of “...art as motherhood.”⁴⁶

³⁹ Lonie, “Narrowing the Gap” in *Bulletin B.156* (Christchurch Art Gallery, Autumn, March-May, 2009), 35.

⁴⁰ Hall, Email correspondence with the author, March 2015.

⁴¹ Paul, “New Forms in Christian Art,” n.p.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Paul, *Imogen* (Days Bay, Eastbourne, N.Z.: Hawk Press, 1978).

⁴⁵ First *Unwrapping the Body*, (Dunedin: Bothwell Press, c.1979), and then again *UNPACKING the BODY* (Presented by Alan Loney in 2009 [1996]). Imogen Rose was born on the 28th of February 1976 and died on the 9th of Dec 1976.

⁴⁶ Paul, “Illustrated talk on being a feminist artist,” n.p.

She writes: “If there is a thesis somewhere it is that knowledge and feeling must run together.”⁴⁷

Commenting on *Unpacking the Body*, Christina Barton and Deborah Lawler-Dormer, in their overview of Feminism in the visual arts from 1973-1993, consider Paul’s “decision to interrogate medical terminology...[as an example] of a feminist impulse to question the structures imposed by patriarchal culture which order knowledge and determine value.”⁴⁸ For them, *Unpacking the Body* is good evidence “that, even in 1977, women artists were negotiating the meanings of femininity in relation to both nature *and* culture, a fact that problematises any essentialist reading of their work.”⁴⁹ Barton and Lawler-Dormer continue:

[Paul’s] sense of exclusion and [a] desire to explore, derive from [a] decision to disrupt the binary systems that determine their place within culture. Such a desire is central to feminist art practice. In particular, it underlies women artists’ sustained critique of Art History, those representational strategies that have rendered women as no more than objects of a masculine gaze, and that, by establishing a hierarchy of genres, have relegated ‘women’s work’ to the outposts of cultural production.⁵⁰

Paul’s iteration of feminism and postmodernism

Paul writes of relating tentatively to an aspect of postmodernism that “[recognised]...subjectivity as the only mode of truth / the impossibility of taking for granted a shared subjectivity / the necessity to build in one’s own perspective / hand, chair, time of day into the construct; [and to] treat words as things.”⁵¹ Reading this last phrase – on treating words as things – delineates a way to read her pictures that

⁴⁷ Paul, “Unpacking the Body,” in “The Women’s Environment at the ’77 Women’s Convention,” in *Spiral* 3 (1978): 39-40. “To me these lists and frames were dry bones—in respect to the splendid flow of imagery and life-blood the rest of the exhibition held. To my pleasure some people responded not simply with ‘I see’ but with emotion.” Ibid., 39-40.

⁴⁸ Christina Barton and Deborah Lawler-Dormer, “‘Unruly practices’: An introduction to A different view: 20 New Zealand women artists 1973 – 1993,” in *alter/ image: Feminism and representation in New Zealand art 1973 – 1993*, ed. Christina Barton and Deborah Lawler-Dormer (Wellington, Auckland: City Gallery and Auckland City Art Gallery, 1993), 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Paul in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 96.

incorporate text to varying degrees, or conversely, a potential reflection on the ‘thingly’ (materially orientated) nature of her poetry. She called herself an ‘unwilling’ postmodernist, in a sense that she did not express a commitment to the theory.

Instead, Paul prefaces her position with reference to a Māori spiritual sensibility: “(I) that no distinction is made between art making & craft / (II) that art is not a linear progression / all periods are equal & present / (III) that objects animate & inanimate share a life [line].”⁵² Without elaborating upon these notions, they sit up front as an acknowledgment of a Māori worldview, that might have implications for the way she wished to qualify her position as a feminist and postmodernist.

Paul acknowledges the influence of feminism in the Christchurch years when she lived on Banks Peninsula and was in contact with women artists in Christchurch.⁵³

Considering her involvement at this time, she writes: “There, suddenly immense energy unleashed – as if women were no longer asking questions but inventing answers – the work was personal witty highly coloured & charged – & distinction between people began to be blurred as between ‘artists’ & others, art and ‘things’.”⁵⁴ Concerning the importance of the movement, and her experience with the Women’s Gallery which opened in 1980, she writes: “I think what was accomplished there was important – using art as a lever into real areas of discourse.”⁵⁵ Paul also expressed the positive outcomes of cultural feminist activity:

⁵² Paul “MIDNIGHT NOTES of a DISSIDENT FEMINIST,” n.p. Paul refers to Shona Rapira Davies with regard to the outline of a Māori spirituality she presents in this document. This document was possibly written in Suffrage Year 1993 – conferring from a reference she makes: “I celebrate suffrage year only wryly remembering what we have forgotten – over the last 100 years how for example to make a table cloth. Patient laborious perfection skilful tasteful & anonymous.” “MIDNIGHT NOTES of a DISSIDENT FEMINIST,” n.p.

⁵³ Paul met Allie Eagle in Auckland, 1969. Heather McPherson became a good friend. McPherson founded a women artists group (which Paul joined) and then *Spiral*. Evans writes: “...from Women Artists Group’s modest beginnings came seven issues of *Spiral*, the women artists’ journal Heather planned. *Spiral* was a ‘floating’ imprint. The collective for each issue—and later each book, video or audio project—was autonomous, whether in Christchurch or in Wellington, the Coromandel or Dunedin.” Marian Evans, “In the Beginning, There Was Heather,” *Medium*, <https://medium.com/spiral-collectives/in-the-beginning-there-was-heather-d2ebbf4dd63c> (accessed 6 November 2018).

⁵⁴ Paul in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 81.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

collaboration...& mutual support...small & [fragmentary] images / Collage,
found art, & a whole range of newly meaningful / Activity & by anyone allowed
under the umbrella of ART...Tho a dissident feminist I felt endorsed in my
chosen subject area of domestic still life...⁵⁶

Yet Paul believed feminism had become “a platitude subverting thought in the 1990s.”⁵⁷
From her perspective a “simple minded” feminism had “conflated” understandings:
“history with patriarchy” and “cultures with oppression,” where the “daring” positions
of the 1970s had become “diluted.”⁵⁸ For her, “debunking a range of traditionally
feminine attributes as stereotypical – essentialist – acculturated” curbed further critical
discussion.⁵⁹

Paul's positioning: margins and multiplicity

Paul often found herself, or intentionally positioned herself, on the margins of the fields
with which she was associated. So it is not as simple as positioning Paul as someone
who resisted feminism but a matter of a more carefully delineated cultural feminism.
She was conscious of her position in gendered terms, considering herself a woman
artist, and this was perhaps what drew her to the community of women artists in the
1970s. She also described herself as a “painter/poet” which reflected her continued
commitment to multiplicity.⁶⁰ She once intimated that she was “speaking in the
feminine as an artist in that teasing phrase of Hélène Cixous.”⁶¹ Cixous’s *écriture
féminine*,⁶² the phrase Paul was probably referring to, is described broadly, (here by

⁵⁶ Paul, “MIDNIGHT NOTES of a DISSIDENT FEMINIST,” n.p.

⁵⁷ Paul writes: “Ideas that are in the air make themselves available to filter experience. And to my mind
simple minded feminism (I’m not talking about more sophisticated self critical exponents / expositions) is
a crude filter.” Paul, “MIDNIGHT NOTES of a DISSIDENT FEMINIST,” n.p.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Paul states: “I don’t think I am genderless as an artist / very much a woman artist or painter that when
needing to sum up my own role or occupation call myself a painter/ poet - (rather than artist) tying my
practice with words and images into one arena.” Paul, “Illustrated talk on being a feminist artist,” n.p.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² A definition of this term reads as follows: “Hélène Cixous coined this term in the widely read essay ‘Le
Rire de la Méduse’ (The Laugh of Medusa) [1975] to describe a kind of writing that is outside of the
masculine economy of patriarchal discourse. Cixous envisages *écriture féminine* as a form of writing that
would, in psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s terms, reside or take place in the realm of the real, rather than
the symbolic. In psychoanalytic terms it therefore takes the form of the expression of the inexpressible
and can only be arrived at via experimentation and play.” Oxford Reference,

Abigail Bray), as “a phenomenological exploration of the materiality of the feminine as thinking itself.”⁶³ Paul had studied philosophy at university and continued to read widely. Through her artistic practice, Paul worked through questions of the relation between the mind and the body, and as her friend Lonie put it, “at least for [Paul], spirituality.”⁶⁴ Tellingly, Paul places the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard alongside Cixous in her notes on being a feminist artist. Bray also makes the connection between these figures: “on a phenomenological level, ‘writing the body’ is also the contemplation of matter.”⁶⁵ Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*, was certainly on Paul’s reading list at one point, with its concern for the phenomenology of intimate spaces: “rooms, forests, shells, corners, closets.”⁶⁶ For Paul, the objects of her still life works often signalled human relationships, and personal dynamics are expressed in the manner her subject matter is rendered through her given mediums. She lists the motif of a “SEA – WALL: definite v indeterminate energy / restriction v freedom / ” and the significance of trees: which for her express a “continuity between self and nature as well as metaphor / ... From Hildegard of Bingen: Everything I know is in a tree...”⁶⁷

Paul’s poetic/painterly sensibility and practice, as an “intense responsiveness to the visual world,”⁶⁸ expressed in her words, as an “avenue for empathy”⁶⁹ with her surroundings, exemplifies an implicit spirituality. She affirms a relationally defined materiality to her approach to practice. In the margins of Paul’s correspondence with

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095741653> (accessed 12 September 2018).

⁶³ Abigail Bray, *Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 73.

⁶⁴ Lonie, “Narrowing the Gap,” 35.

⁶⁵ Bray continues: “In *The Poetics of Reverie*, Gaston Bachelard writes that ‘We believe that our reveries can be the best school for the “psychology of the depths.”’ For Bachelard ‘the poets of reverie’ is a poetics of the *anima*, or the feminine. He attempts ‘an *anima* philosophy, a philosophy of the psychology of the deep feminine.’” Bachelard *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 58, 62, 67, in Bray, *Hélène Cixous*, 73.

⁶⁶ Paul included in her notes a photocopy of the first page from “chapter five: shells” of *The Poetics of Space*, where flowers and shells are the privileged objects of wonder and the poet is “arrested in [her] flight towards dream values by the geometrical reality of the forms.” Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, transl. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 105.

⁶⁷ Paul, “Illustrated talk on being a feminist artist,” n.p.

⁶⁸ Paul, interview by Barrie, n.p.

⁶⁹ Paul writes of painting as an “avenue for empathy.” She continues: “I used to feel vis a vis a familiar landscape, completed by it; as much as by my face in the mirror.” Paul in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 93.

Eagle, she considers her connection to the landscape, writing: “MATERIAL / BODY / WORLD / BONDING.”⁷⁰

While noting the postmodern tendencies of Paul’s work and practice, Trevelyan draws attention to the point that Paul was at the same time “also a romantic much drawn to mysticism, [who] often returned to the Modernist idea of the artist as a conduit.”⁷¹ This is the crux of Paul’s positioning, of what Dick Whyte observed, “(…as the (somewhat) unusual practice of combining religious metaphor, with feminist politics, experimental poetics, and personal documentary).”⁷² Trevelyan attempts to explain this tension between her romantic sensibility and postmodern articulation, through offering a reflection on the “subtlety and complexity” of her work that “[seems] to reject such ‘either/or’ frameworks.”⁷³ Paul’s sensibility was one of multiplicity: while a ‘romantic’ by nature, she was widely read and immersed enough in her immediate cultural context to maintain an equilibrium between these different intellectual strands. She didn’t seem to want to be pinned down, within any of the cultural, religious or political spheres in which she was involved.

In much of Paul’s work, there is the absence of any established iconographical tradition that might explicitly state religious meaning. There is, however, a sense of continuity between the everyday and the religious. Tellingly, Paul linked her concerns with feminism and Catholicism in a structural sense. In a letter to Evans, Paul writes that her work was, “...part of a possible continuum with other related [women’s] work. [Adding the note:] Concerns: feminism is no more an influence than Catholicism, an obsession with the structure of language & myth, & a sense of the past[.]”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Ibid., 93.

⁷¹ Trevelyan, “‘To See the moment is to farewell it,’” 21.

⁷² Dick Whyte, “A Place for Shadows: A Prolegomena to the Authorship Practices and Films of Joanna Margaret Paul” (MA. Diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2008), 159.

⁷³ Trevelyan, “‘To See the moment is to farewell it,’” 21.

⁷⁴ Paul, Undated letter from 14 Beta Street Dunedin. Evans, “Development,” 35. The context of this letter addressed the preparations of a touring exhibition with Allie Eagle which was planned, but did not take place, in 1979. For Evans, Eagle and Paul shared a “common use of a diversity of media, [an] exploration of women’s subjectivity and what Bridie calls their ‘calligraphic similarities’...” Evans in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 80. Bridie Lonie and Marian Evans sought QEII funding to support a touring exhibition of Eagle’s and Paul’s work – the funding was declined, and Eagle and Paul “decided they were not ready for the kind of exposure suggested.” Evans, “Development,” 46. Evans and Lonie subsequently went on to start the Women’s Gallery.

I now consider Paul's religious sensibility more directly, locating strands of theological tradition in her own reflections on her art practice in relation to her religious life and thought. I keep Paul's postmodern and feminist references in view, as these qualities meet in the quotidian.

Paul's religious disposition: of feeling and restraint

In Paul's reflection "On Not Being a Catholic Writer" in *The Source of the Song: New Zealand Writers on Catholicism*, she lists the men and women, poets, writers and thinkers who influenced her religious life and work.⁷⁵ Her thoughts on her practice approach a kind of theological phenomenology, through turns of phrases that mediate personal or conventional metaphors. Paul presented what she called a "sacramental theology" in the description of a poetics that was drawn from both Catholic and Reformed liturgical style.⁷⁶ This view could also be found in her ethical and political activism with the influence of what she called the "catholic mystical creaturely tradition of nature in God and God in nature."⁷⁷ Paul was an original thinker who drew upon different, yet somewhat complementary, strands of theological tradition, and she was aware of the arguments that hold Christianity accountable for the "domination" of nature.⁷⁸

Paul's inherited Presbyterian sensibility, she states, counters her love of Catholic ritual and liturgy: "sparely furnished rooms, cool paintings, guarded praise, no *schwärmerei* [excessive sentiment], thank God."⁷⁹ She adds, that she was both "ironic and romantic."⁸⁰ For Paul, "Catholicism was an absolute - demanded dedication & 'sacrifice.' Had deep roots...sacralised *thing* [sic] (those things my painter's eye dreamed)."⁸¹ She wrote of "the beauty of the sacraments – spirit and thing together, the

⁷⁵ Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," in *The Source of the Song: New Zealand Writers on Catholicism*, ed. Mark Williams (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995).

⁷⁶ Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 136.

⁷⁷ Paul, "What are the Churches Saying about Genetic Engineering?" in *Mischief in Creation*, ed. Joanna Margaret Paul (Unpublished manuscript, MS-Papers-9473 -033. Paul, Joanna, 1945-2003: Papers. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand).

⁷⁸ Paul, *Mischief in Creation*, n.p.

⁷⁹ Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 134.

⁸⁰ Paul, "from Rooms and Episodes: 2 - Written at St Omer," 44.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

necessity of art” as being reasons that drew her to the Catholic faith.⁸² Later she would turn to Quakerism.

Paul admitted to what she described as a “female diffidence or Presbyterian reticence” about herself, writing: “My poems I think all tread the same line of feeling and restraint. Thus my sacramental theology – a distrust of extravagance, a liking for the holding forms of ritual and liturgy and poetry.”⁸³ A formal quality contains, or mediates, her sense of the sacred, as the excerpt from the letter to Evans (citing a connection between Catholicism and feminism) above confirms. Eagle affirms this formal quality to her work:

Your choice of Catholicism seemed linked to your sense of the poetry & forms found in liturgical symbolism...I think of the drawings you’ve done: bowls, chalices, containing forms...I’m thinking of a chalice, water, the Blood, a knife & sacrifice -- & your Imogen & your *Unpacking the body* 1977...utilitarian household forms evoking deeper questions – even contemplating Christ – perhaps? ... [Joanna:] *Yes; & yet the images are all implicit in the language of the body. I invented nothing but drew out, if under the pressure of experience, the poem buried in names.*⁸⁴

The conversation between Eagle and Paul, as they broach the significance of Christianity in their work respectively, induces a response from Paul that is characteristically reserved: “you now keep confronting me Allie, with this question of Christianity. I offer a poem, & accent our difference and our sameness in a dream.”⁸⁵ Paul presents a description of a dream with images of protest and a hill top vision where: “The young vines were covered w a coarse white cloth. I cd see the light/shadows in the white [sic]”⁸⁶ Paul also includes a reproduction of her poem “on the transfiguration” (1982-83).

⁸² Paul, “On Not Being a Catholic Writer,” 135.

⁸³ Ibid., 136.

⁸⁴ Eagle in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 85.

⁸⁵ Paul in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 90.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 92.

On the transfiguration

the Jesuit said

how would you paint the resurrection?

‘I see it as detail only in black & white.

a photograph, feet in mud, his ankles swelling

against the distant flare of dawn, dark

earth spreading to a low horizon’

& replied

‘your resurrection portrays

sharing in life to me but what of

receiving life ...not an old life but a

new one?’

the door swings

onto the smell of wet concrete

warm chlorine

high up

I see a white dress hanging

thru the mesh

& beside me

a girl bends tying on a white

figured skirt over

slender beige legs & panties

joined at the hip

at the pool

a woman stands waiting

blond hair knotted, crimson

jacket merging with the clothes

of the baby she is holding
framed by grey plate glass
that opens on
a brilliant lawn white legs
& stems of silver
birch trees.

Her skirt is white.

again that night
'you look beautiful in blue;
'I only notice women wearing
white, like you.'

let us put up 3 tents to celebrate

The change over.

now
we are in a bright office
3 women talking about the transformations
in our lives
when our laughter & the light
strikes
a chain of women hurrying past the window
heads bent their eyes flash disapproval;
they are angry crying praying
O let us join them.

Without knowing the specific life experience that might have informed Paul's poem, especially the sudden appearance of the chain of women in the last few lines, I read this contemplation on the idea of transfiguration as expressive of a feminist sensibility. The poem concludes, with the entrance of transfigured light into a room where the three women seem to be interrupted by a necessity to join a larger cause. The transition, from how Paul would paint the resurrection to a poetic woman-centred depiction of the transfiguration, makes a link between the biblical texts. In the gospel texts, the

transfiguration episode is placed in reference to the first prophesy of Christ's death and the coming of the kingdom of God. This allows for an interpretation that considers the biblical text of the transfiguration as an anticipation of the resurrection.⁸⁷ Whiteness is a common biblical metaphor for the transcendent quality of the divine. In the transfiguration text, the figure of Christ takes on this character: "the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white."⁸⁸ The 3 tents are a reference to the biblical three tents Peter proposed as monuments to Jesus, Moses and Elijah at the site of the transfiguration. In Paul's poem, three women mark transformations in their lives. The single white dress, and white clothing, in the poem also read as references to the white appearance of figures at the transfiguration. Whiteness governs Paul's theological interpretation of transfigured light in this poem, and as I go on to show, is central to her oeuvre as a whole.

Continuing her discussion on the relation of religion to her practice, Paul describes a sticking point between Catholicism and her vocation as a writer, (or "housewife/painter, writer/painter, painter/poet" as she variously described herself).⁸⁹ She states: "As catholic I observe the conventions, am part of a community: as a writer I can't take anything on anyone else's say so...Between catholic and passionate non-conformist⁹⁰ an interior dialogue persists."⁹¹ Conversations that Paul had with Hall also explore these tensions in her faith and practice. Hall's poem *Shaddai* outlines one of these conversations:

⁸⁷ See for example, James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William BB. Eerdmans, 2002), 271.

⁸⁸ Luke 9:29 (NRSV)

⁸⁹ Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 134.

⁹⁰ In an earlier draft of "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," Paul had written "protestant." MS-Papers-9473.

⁹¹ Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 136.

shaddai⁹²

for Joanna Margaret Paul

‘Could the fullness of humanity ever
Have happened within the confines of The Garden?’
I’m reading to Joanna, backed into a gate
at Seacliff. Rusty padlock, rusty chain,
the land falling away. The asylum is empty.
We’ve eaten pickled walnuts on ryebread
and brie and now she’s painting the beautiful
big blue sea, her left hand
open on her thin knee. ‘Did you know,
my dear, that Shaddai, the Breasted One,
is one of the many names of God in Genesis?
That the other name of Eve is Zoë, Life?
That Isaiah’s prophetic poetry
was written, more than likely, by his wife?’

While Hall was reading feminist theology, a burgeoning field at the time of their correspondence, Paul maintained her distance, stating “I love your poem...but remit its ethos. I would have gladly baked bread for Isaiah.”⁹³

Paul’s religious sensibility, like her artistic practice, inhabited the borders of traditions. In recent comment on Paul’s spiritual disposition, writers feel inclined to consider the influence of Eastern religious thought on her practice.⁹⁴ Peter Ireland, noting her shift from Catholicism to the Society of Friends, considers the influence of Buddhism in her religious life. He writes: “the special pleasures in her work are strongly tinged by a

⁹² Hall, *Still Talking* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997). This poem was written in 1996 at Seacliff. Paul spent the year in Dunedin and Hall was the University of Otago Burns Fellow. Hall cites Miriam Therese Winter, *Womanwisdom: A Feminist Lectionary & Psalter. Women of the Hebrew Scriptures: Part One* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991).

⁹³ Hall, “Bread for Isaiah: Joanna Margaret Paul,” in *brief* 32, 57.

⁹⁴

sense of the sacred – the holiness of simplicity and of living intensely in the present moment.”⁹⁵ The influence of haiku poetry on Paul’s practice, is evidence to support this view. She held a “respect” for the influence of Chinese painting and the Tao on her mother Janet Paul.⁹⁶ Paul’s liking for Chinese calligraphy,⁹⁷ can also be named as part of her modernist heritage that encompasses an understated connection between modern aesthetics and eastern philosophy.

Liturgical works

Paul’s religious position within her practice was understated in her work, and she was reticent in her personal expression of it. She did however, produce some specifically liturgical works in her lifetime. Paul undertook a collaborative project with architect and designer Mark Southcombe for the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and the Holy Family Church, Gonville, Wanganui (c. 1992). Southcombe and Paul collaborated on designs for the liturgical furniture and window designs – of which Paul selected the glass. She also produced the design for the rose window.⁹⁸ Blue and white are predominant in the colour scheme for these works.

Paul was also commissioned to make two *Stations of the Cross* at different times. One of them was commissioned for an Anglican Church, but the series was not received. Another *Stations of the Cross* series was made for St Mary Star of the Sea, in Port Chalmers, (c. 1970-71, ref. 51, fig. 15). Paul described these as “bright beautiful simple even childish images with a consciously symbolic use of colour.”⁹⁹ But again, “the parishioners did not like them.”¹⁰⁰ This *Stations of the Cross* follows a traditional format. Paul asks her viewers to read through a material and symbolic use of colour, which she employed “to express the aridity of the journey.”¹⁰¹ There are deep purples, bright yellows, a black cross that merges with a black ground in the crucifixion station. The figures all have white faces, and Christ’s robe is white. The station where Christ is

⁹⁵ Ireland, “Joanna Margaret Paul: Robert Heald Gallery,” *EyeContact*, <http://eyecontactsite.com/2013/10/joanna-margaret-paul-photographs> (accessed 23 March 2015).

⁹⁶ See Paul in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 95.

⁹⁷ Paul, “New Forms in Christian Art,” n.p.

⁹⁸ Mark Southcombe, Email correspondence with the author, November 2016.

⁹⁹ Paul, “Written at St Omer,” 46.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Paul, “New Forms in Christian Art,” n.p.

disrobed depicts the detail of a white torso only, and he becomes a white figure on a black cross against a black ground. I see an intertextual symbolism in the whiteness of the figures in this series. I think of Paul's poem "on the transfiguration" where she is asked how she might paint the resurrection. 'I see it as detail only in black and white,' the poem reads. The transfiguration is commonly read in anticipation of the resurrection, and it is linked with the baptism and crucifixion narratives. There are intertextual echoes between the texts: of the voice of God, the presence of the transcendent cloud, the rending of the heavens, the reference to Elijah and so on.¹⁰² I am interpreting Paul's use of white in this series in a broadly intertextual fashion, but her last station, that depicts a white tree springing from a green and blue horizon line, also reads as a gesture in anticipation of the resurrection, with a view of transfigured nature from the open tomb. Her use of white in this series has a connection with her use of white more generally, but in the *Stations of the Cross* it has a more direct liturgical character.

Paul's religious affiliations found expression in her work in several ways: through the implicit symbolism of objects of everyday life; through her use of colour; through her insistence on sacredness of the natural world and her relation to it; and her aesthetic sense of "feeling and restraint."¹⁰³ These approaches reveal the sense of a lived 'faith' experience that is not directly expressed in religious terms but embedded within the dealings of everyday life. Paul's reference to sacramental theology, conceived of in the context of liturgical tradition, does not necessarily read as a type of sacramental theology in the strict sense, but rather a material religious expression of the sacred. Two primary categories emerge in which Paul's spiritual sensibility finds expression: first, her poetic and phenomenological use of white space in connection with, second, a relational aesthetics that defines her sense of the spiritual in art through affirming the sacredness of nature and the everyday.

¹⁰² See Andrew P. Wilson, *Transfigured: A Derridean Re-Reading of the Markan Transfiguration* (New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2007), 102.

¹⁰³ Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 136.

Paul's signature use of white space: a visual poetry

Paul's poetic restraint is reflected in her signature use of the white ground. Paul's attentiveness to the particularities of her domestic everyday life, was often supported in her work by open surfaces of white exposed paper (see ref. 52, fig. 16). In her other artistic modalities, the way she employs light is still present. In her photography, for example, light is transposed as black through transparent film emulsion (see ref. 53, fig. 17). This is a formal move, a modality of "visual poetry" as she put it:

...I have tried to pay attention to the effects of light, the way light explicates the world; the complementary burr produced by adjacent colours, the way this creates line, & a linear mesh that articulates the painting; the sense in which this linear interface of object/area can be used to define *spaces* with the same or greater clarity than *objects* – the possibilities here for a visual poetry.¹⁰⁴

Paul's signature absence of descriptive line and colour has been described by O'Brien as "recurrent blind spots," the "silence in music," or "a vision too intense."¹⁰⁵ Bellette describes her work as having "a kind of distinct propriety about it" in her manner of knowing "what should not be done" and this in turn "[permits] the expression of the small, sudden joys and the immense deprivations which echo through her work."¹⁰⁶ In a similar vein, Hall described her use of white through a "method of cutting away material in order to reveal what remains..."¹⁰⁷ Ireland expresses this succinctly, and in spiritual terms, as a:

...conversation with the particulars of the physical world [that] was often conducted in the great and potent silence of negative space—that apparent emptiness 'between' lines of text, pencil marks or wads of colour that is no less an active part in the formal dynamic than anything positively marked or made. Absence become presence. This mystical relationship mirrored the one she

¹⁰⁴ Paul, in Paul and Eagle, "Letters from Room to Room," 92.

¹⁰⁵ O'Brien, "Always quartettish thoughts", 31.

¹⁰⁶ Bellette, "Joanna Paul: Words and Pictures," 45.

¹⁰⁷ Hall, Email correspondence with the author, March 2015.

herself experienced with her work, and now, through that work, mirrors the one she has with us.¹⁰⁸

Lonie also writes of the white space as emitting presence rather than absence, having an effect that pushes towards a kind of visual transcendence in the sense of an added something more for the viewer:

Sometimes it erases everything else, expanding across the drawn line. In the drawings she did in my father's house, a white mirror almost catches the ghost on the staircase. Or a nappy, harsh and sharp against black film, incises the force of life against darkness. In print, it is the word itself, white. Through that space, breath enters and leaves.¹⁰⁹

For Paul, the presence of white space in her work often became the subject, on par with any objects of study. The painter Giorgio Morandi was an influential figure for Paul in this regard; in her words, she found in him a “shape to part the space.”¹¹⁰ She admired the “materiality of light” in his work, as Eagle puts it, and his focus on the domestic and ordinary, and an anonymity which sat in opposition to grand painterly statements of modernity.¹¹¹ There was also a meditative spiritual sensibility to Morandi, that was grounded in “the reciprocity between seer and seen – between who one is and what one sees...” as Roger Lipsey states.¹¹² He continues, with a statement that chimes with Paul's sensibility: “The act of looking and the answering gift of intense visibility are mystery enough for those rare painters who find in them all the theology they need... They love visibility... as if the grandeur and subtlety of the act of seeing, and of things seen, leave little room for the demanding ego.”¹¹³ Morandi's groupings of still life objects also evoke, for Lipsey, “an abstract *sacra conversazione*” or “wordless ‘sacred conversation’” as an echo of Renaissance altarpieces where saints gather.¹¹⁴ The idea that vessels may stand in for human figures and relationships, is also clear in Paul's

¹⁰⁸ Ireland, “A Shape to Part the Space,” 97.

¹⁰⁹ Lonie, “Joanna Paul, a view from here,” 25.

¹¹⁰ Paul, “Blessings on Morandi” in *Imogen* (Eastbourne, Wellington: Hawk Press, 1978), n.p.

¹¹¹ Allie Eagle, Phone conversation with author, May 2015.

¹¹² Roger Lipsey, *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1997), 365-366.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 363.

work. It can also be said that Paul shared Morandi's phenomenological approach, which "transformed [everyday objects] into what [they were]" as people: "silent, receptive, luminous, solitary yet bound into the whole" for Morandi,¹¹⁵ and for Paul, writing on the great meaning of ordinary things which defined her practice: "anonymity pattern utility quietness relatedness."¹¹⁶ Paul described Morandi as "the poet of still-life [and] the poet of the confined life."¹¹⁷ It is clear that the restraint of Morandi's practice appealed to her, as did the serial nature of his work – an artist who also visited the same objects over and over again. Paul's poem "blessings on Morandi" (ref. 54, fig. 18), in the centre fold of her *Imogen* series, demonstrates this equivalence of space with shape that characterised Morandi's and Paul's art. The lines of verse articulate a central space, as a vessel, in a series of poems where the subject of the death of her daughter is acknowledged in presence even when she is absent.

Paul brings to light an important insight: the presence of love within the attention she brought to the page in the process of making, activates the space. Absence becomes presence through this attentiveness which in turn elicits an emotional import for the artist and viewer. In reference to her *Mortality* (1981, ref. 55) series, she states:

...the space in between becomes increasingly the subject...the white rectangle (of the page) becomes the subject and the dense and patterned objects of still life – my many jugs and cups – become the margins. Working with a strong sense of mortality because of my brother-in-law's illness and death around me, the white space tended to swallow up the imagery. Without the pressure of mortality or love, perhaps...the whiteness can become simply inert space.¹¹⁸

A work that belongs to Bernadette Hall, a commission with the biblical inscription in both English and Latin: *Be Still and Know that I am God*, (1982, ref. 56) is a quintessential example of where her religious sensibility meets her use of white. Hall writes of the circumstances surrounding the time she commissioned Paul for a painting.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 366.

¹¹⁶ Paul in *An exhibition of six women artists*, 12-13, cited in *Spiral 1* (1976): 41.

¹¹⁷ Paul, "Web of Living," n.p.

¹¹⁸ Paul in O'Brien, "Beyond Sensation," 69-71.

At a particularly trying time in Hall's life, she gave Paul the biblical phrase "Be Still and Know that I am God," from Psalm 46:10. Hall writes,

I described a mash up of browns and olive greens and smears of orange and speckled egg shells ... I gave her little green snouts and little white claws as they break out of the glossy planets of avocado stones. I gave her compost, everything zingy and restless and full of effervescence and the desire for change as I was.¹¹⁹

The work Hall received from Paul did not contain the fullness and earthiness she was imagining. It was a triptych of white paper with marginal washes of colour: a swatch of brown upon the edge of the first frame; boarder placements of green in the centre work; and a small central pool of blue, and a line of red in the third frame. Hall said it took time for the unforeseen work to settle with her, until she came to see great "... value [in] the gifts they gave [her] of light and silence and space."¹²⁰

Paul's interpretation of the biblical phrase provided by Hall, finds expression in white paper, framed only by intimations of earthiness, and a small window into blue. In the centre panel, the word GOD is written in faint pencil – barely discernible. Paul's usual written form of G-d, following Jewish custom, is here instead inscribed with a single dot inside the o of GOD, marking the very centre of the work as a whole. An interpretation of this triptych might easily follow as a reference to the trinity: the square of heavenly blue, framed in gold, reads as the Holy Spirit and, on the left, in a red frame, the earthy brown wash with cross hatching could be read as the Incarnation. God the creator, framed in black and green, sits in the centre. Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God!" is written both in Latin, and English. Hall wrote a poem on this work:

Joanna's Paintings

Colours drift off the edge,
borage blue, a trickle of blood,

¹¹⁹ Hall, "Fandom: Poet Bernadette Hall on the "zesty metamorphosis" of compost," Booknotes Unbound <http://booknotes-unbound.org.nz/bernadette-hall-compost/> (accessed 28 March 2016.)

¹²⁰ Ibid.

leaving more room to manoeuvre.

You write in pencil on shafts

of air 'be still and know'

in mirrored Latin.

A radical simplicity,

no defence at the root.

I must think you in the hand

of a god or I tremble.¹²¹

As one of the more explicitly iconographic works Paul might have made, *Be still and know that I am God* is good evidence for her statements on the significance of white as a religious motif. The work does not reproduce well. The white recedes for the most part, and the green in the centre piece appears to run haphazardly down the page. In the flesh, the wash of blue in this work is rendered assuredly with a depth and clarity that pulls the vision of the viewer into the sky – a cypher for the blue of heaven. Bachelard's (and Klein's) blue *depth* is referenced from a distance.¹²²

Paul's religious sensibility is perhaps most immediately understood in and through her use of white. Paul, in conversation with Eagle, writes:

More and more I see my marks as simply energizing and articulating the white space of the paper/ /ground of multiplicity; as if the paper/ /the lens of religious intuition.¹²³

In this instance, Paul inserts spaces of white in the text to make her point, inserting the absence of language, like the pause in music, a concrete poetry that obliges us to read the white space.

¹²¹ From Hall, *Heartwood* (Caxton, 1989), 52. On the same page Hall includes a quote from Germaine Greer at the beginning of this poem: "In short, women lived on a different scale from men; they took up less room."

¹²² Bachelard: "First there is *nothing*, then there is a *deep* nothing, then there is a blue *depth*." Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 168, in Klein, "Lecture at the Sorbonne," in *Overcoming the Problematics of Art*, 86.

¹²³ Paul in Paul and Eagle, "Letters from Room to Room," 93.

Emotion and the apophatic

While Paul's use of white does not necessarily mark an avenue for divine presence, it might articulate a meditative quality, or stillness, softness, and perhaps a reference to an apophatic theology. Paul's series of drawings entitled *The Window of St John of the Cross* (1988, ref. 57), refer to the tradition of apophatic theology, through contrasting rich green foliage with white space. These drawings compositionally delineate the view through a small window that St John of the Cross might have had, as imagined from his cell at the time he wrote the *Dark Night of the Soul* while imprisoned in Toledo. Paul's drawing consists of two parallel lines on a page of white that envelops a lush garden. In reference to these works in relation to Christianity, Paul writes: "There's a correlation there between richness and privation"¹²⁴ which echoes here her sensibility of 'feeling and restraint' (or 'joy' and 'deprivation'). Adding to her comments on this work, she draws the poet Rainer Maria Rilke into the conversation, adding the phrase: "as if an angel was blind & looking into himself..."¹²⁵ While Rilke was not without intimations of the apophatic in his work, this phrase perhaps better refers to the idea of transfiguring the world through inner vision, of which the figure of the angel is the quintessential symbol.¹²⁶ The objects of everyday life are transfigured by the poet through "taking [the outer world] into [her] own soul."¹²⁷

Adding to Paul's references to the apophatic, Hall drew my attention to Paul's poem "Drawing the Negative Space" (1998) which Paul wrote on a visit to London, where she did not visit significant sites:

¹²⁴ Paul in O'Brien, "Beyond Sensation," 75.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ The wider passage which contains the quote Paul cited reads as follows: "The Spanish landscape... Toledo drove this attitude of mine to its extreme: since the external thing itself tower, hill, bridge already possessed the incredible, unsurpassable intensity of the inner equivalents through which one might have been able to represent it. External world and vision everywhere coincided as it were in the object; in each a whole inner world was displayed, as though an angel who embraces space were blind and gazing into himself." Rilke, "Ellen Delp, Munich, October 27, 1915," in *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke Vol. Two 1910–1926*, trans. by Jane Bannard Greene and M.D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1949), 145–146. Gary Lachman refers to the Angel of the *Elegies* as "a symbol of transfigured being." Gary Lachman, "Bees of the invisible" in Lachman, *The Quest for Hermes Trismegistus: From Ancient Egypt to the Modern World*, (Floris Books, 2011), n.p. file:///C:/Users/Joanna/Downloads/[Gary_Lachman]_The_Quest_For_Hermes_Trismegistus(b-ok.cc).epub (Accessed 6 November 2018).

¹²⁷ Lachman, "Bees of the invisible," n.p.

I did not go to the Roman Villa

It was five o'clock, & closed.

The custodian gave me

a glass of water.

I saw the bluebells

in a pool of blue

under trees

[...]

I did not go to Hampstead.

Did not see the artist, the private view

I did not go to Charleston

I did not go to Kettles yard

Did not enter the Queens House at Greenwich

Or the noble Banqueting House by Jones

I saw the outside only.

[...] ¹²⁸

Hall comments on the lightness of Paul's sentences in this poem, and again her restraint, and the "clarity" of colour, which to her also intimates liturgical form: "her favourite colours, white and blue, Mary's colours; the luminosity as of water-colours."¹²⁹ Hall confirms the connection between the empty space, and a spiritual attitude of "emptying:"

It's a challenge to touristic rush...but handled so subtly with firmness and decisiveness and a little barb in [the] repetition at the end...It's as if Joanna's way of living was like the emptiness of the paintings where the space would be filled, would fill itself with something not palpable. The way of not wanting – of

¹²⁸ An excerpt from Paul, "Drawing the Negative Space," in *Like love poems. Joanna Margaret Paul: Selected Poems*, ed. Bernadette Hall (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006), 112.

¹²⁹ Hall, Email correspondence with author, March 2015.

emptying, of being scourged by God. So sickness and exhaustion and sorrow might be transfigured, might be seen as active spiritual pathways.¹³⁰

Paul confirms this notion of spiritual emptying, drawing on the notion of *kenosis*¹³¹ in her 2001 series of poems *the cherry now* with which she punctuates a poem describing the falling blossom of cherry trees: "... /pink blossom carpets / the lawn in / the old cherry trees / ..."¹³² In this poem grey headstones are found in a sculpture garden filled with blossom. *Kenosis*, a notion describing the self-emptying of divine attributes in the Incarnation, or the self-surrender of Christ at the Cross, opens the door to a freight of theological tradition.¹³³ Kenotic theology has vast interpretive implications, but reading *kenosis* as a contemplative notion with links to a form of apophatic spiritual practice provides a basis for understanding Paul's use of the word here. I would like to think, following Sarah Coakley, that this form of "'self-emptying' is not a negation of self, but the place of the self's transformation and expansion into God."¹³⁴ *Kenosis* is an originary definition of love. The centre poem in Paul's *the cherry now*, contained the handwritten Greek, *eknosis*, which obliquely translates as a possible form of knowledge;¹³⁵ in Paul's language this could translate as knowledge of herself in relation and connection to the tree, or nature in general. However, upon locating a correction of *eknosis* to *kenosis* in her notes at the Alexander Turnbull Library, the word *kenosis* more readily alludes to the imagery of the falling blossom: as the end of a season; detachment and change; an emptying in the sense Hall alludes to.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Mistakenly printed as *eknosis* in the published volume of poetry. Later I discovered a correction in a booklet of unpublished poems among Paul's papers at the Alexander Turnbull Library. MS-Papers-9473.

¹³² Paul, *the cherry now*, printed by Brendan O'Brien (Fernbank Studio, Rita Angus Cottage, Wellington, 2001).

¹³³ Philippians 2: 6-7 provides the biblical origins of this term. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on the cross." (NRSV).

¹³⁴ Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 36.

¹³⁵ Thanks to Paul Tebilco for interpretive assistance with this word.

Three leaves hang on the cherry tree
cardinal virtues
in a life stripped of
circumstance

Where the beauty of the blossom is outlined through a grey “shadow of bloom,”¹³⁶ through the sound of rain, and through the conduction of water over a weir, and the low light of the sun, a kind of death occurs in the self-emptying concept of *kenosis*. These themes and the form of the poem interconnect with Paul’s wider aesthetic of ‘feeling and restraint’:

cherry bloom
yet winter intercepts
the memory of you –

Hall drew my attention to the very connectedness of Paul’s life and art. Hall mentioned a particular time that she recalled Paul’s paintings being especially empty, with tiny pencil bites like “mouse scratches.”¹³⁷ Hall recalled a letter she received from Paul, where she spoke of her spiritual life at a difficult time, with a remark about being “scoured by God.”¹³⁸ White would enter Paul’s works in times of grief, *Imogen*, being a case in point, where the last line of Paul’s poem, “Thursday – Thursday,”¹³⁹ from this series, reads:

afterward : the hallowed days

scoured by God.

¹³⁶ Paul, *the cherry now*, n.p.

¹³⁷ Hall, Email correspondence with author, March 2015.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Paul, from “Thursday – Thursday,” in *Imogen*, n.p.

The white spaces in Paul's work often reflected sorrow – 'scouring times' in her life – yet they are also the very spaces that open towards the potential of the presence of the divine: faith and life. At the same time, whiteness delineated love.

Paul celebrated specificity: where time, place, context, and subjectivity, was imbued with an interior symbolism and her work was a mode of making for emotional relief and expression. As Lonie writes, "No drawing for her was simply a visual response... Each was a doorway into and from her mind, and a negotiation between the given and what one might want."¹⁴⁰ In Bellette's words, her works "...act mysteriously as signs and ciphers for an inner world of feeling..."¹⁴¹ He continues: "What we have here is an actual transference of emotion to the objects, which enact the love ritual in terms of proximities, superimpositions, rearrangements within a frame."¹⁴² As Mark Amery puts it: "Perhaps Joanna Margaret Paul's key strength as a contemporary artist was to exploit the possibilities of the quick, ephemeral nature of drawing as a tool in exploring how seeing is connected to feeling."¹⁴³

For Paul, an affect-driven encounter with the world is what drives her practice. Paul writes of colour as being a "barometer" for her: "muddy as at art school – clean watercolour after each baby..."¹⁴⁴ Through colour, Hall sees the expression of desire in her work:

That is clear in her love poems. Her brilliantly coloured paintings of vessels seem of interest to me in this matter. The jug, the plate, the bowl, all with the capacity to hold and fill. The sexual brilliance of the colours as a language for desire. Her paintings which incorporate lines from Shakespeare's love sonnets.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Lonie, "Narrowing the Gap," 35.

¹⁴¹ Bellette, "Joanna Paul: Words and Pictures," 46.

¹⁴² Ibid., 45.

¹⁴³ Mark Amery, "Joanna Margaret Paul: The Drawing Room," in *The Lumière Reader*, <http://lumiere.net.nz/reader/arts.php/item/649> (accessed 19 April 2016)

¹⁴⁴ Paul, "Letters from Room to Room," 92.

¹⁴⁵ Hall, Email correspondence with the author, March 2015.

In other instances, Paul's use of colour carries intimations of her spiritual outlook through a sense of joy and desire. Paul makes a differentiation between emotion and spirit:

That the TONES (of a landscape) are delicate vehicles of emotion

*8 squares panes & the clear creases of curtains
these shadows contain my childhood
grey dark grey night white*

from *Paloma* (1971)

while colour can express the spirit.

*the gulls fly like arrows streaming ceaselessly
dark against the sky pale against the ocean
but into the white cloud their flight is white*

(1982)¹⁴⁶

The importance of grey is acknowledged as something Paul gleaned from her mother's practice: "always some grey in a picture."¹⁴⁷ With regard to Paul's films, Whyte picks up on the fact that, "all of Joanna's films...return to grey: especially the grey of concrete, of gravestones, of side-walks, of car-parks, of walls, and of buildings. From black, to white, to grey: a phenomenology of 'tones'"¹⁴⁸ which – whether Paul would agree with Whyte or not – he labels a kind of "spiritual indifference."¹⁴⁹ Paul's work *A Lament* (1997, ref. 58), featuring Dunedin's iconic Harbour Cone in the top quarter of the work, contains a large grey oval in its centre, bisected by the edge of the painting's support, and surrounded by a resilient azure blue. The phrase "A LAMENT" is

¹⁴⁶ Paul, "Letters from Room to Room," 92.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 92.

¹⁴⁸ Whyte, "A Place for Shadows," 123.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

inscribed on the lower right edge of the work, where white silhouette forms sit in the foreground. I read the oval of grey as a cypher for lamentation, as it sits in stark contrast to the clarity and brilliance of the blue; the grey is a void, a blot in the landscape.

The white spaces of Paul's work support her use of colour, where often her emotional and spiritual sensibilities converge. Her approach to "[making] something simple" through a poem or a painting, to bring balance, or convey joy, through her works, make up the formal and material basis of her spiritual sensibility.¹⁵⁰ Her sense of connection to the world as mediated through her work elucidates this sensibility: Paul's phenomenology of white, meets a reference to the apophatic which is earthed in her lived experience.

Paul's sacramental theology

Through the shaped spaces of the
bed frame; through the flower
carved in the wood & through the
window pane; through the pierced
veranda hood, the foliate rose I
see the straight & curved branches
parting of a tree.

Without the lens
heaven, / the heavens less understood.¹⁵¹

In addition to her use of white space, Paul refers to this poem as a more direct exemplification of a "lens of religious intuition."¹⁵² The connection between Paul's relationship with colour and subjective emotional experience here meets her spiritual sensibility. She writes:

¹⁵⁰ Paul, "Web of Living," n.p.

¹⁵¹ Paul, "Through the shaped spaces of the / bed frame," in *Like love poems*, 17. From Paul, "Barry's Bay" c.1974. Also in Paul, "Songs of Seven Seasons."

¹⁵² Paul in Paul and Eagle, "Letters from Room to Room," 93.

You try to paint that which takes you beyond sensation, beyond the painting. I'm interested in the experience that goes beyond, for instance, the landscape. It's something you can read in abstract or spiritual terms as well as representational terms and that isn't a contradiction. Perhaps I'm talking about a "religious" imagery – the natural world as a garment of G-D and also a storehouse of metaphor.¹⁵³

Here Paul defines her work beyond the confines of the genres of landscape or still life, to include ways of reading emotional and or spiritual content in the work. In reflecting on her personal definition of a "sacramental theology" as an aesthetic of "feeling and restraint" Paul writes: "I hope I am not fudging issues to see in the aetiology of love a metaphor."¹⁵⁴ Aetiology, referring to the cause of something, here implies an investigation of the cause of love, and a metaphor for a mode of approaching the divine. She likens human love in the attempt to identify with the beloved, by "imitating [their] handwriting," in order to understand their own "being in the world."¹⁵⁵ She draws out a metaphor of a "lover/receiver" for that of an artist or scientist "who looks for the Creator in the growth of a tree."¹⁵⁶ Paul cites Augustine's phrase "*God loving himself through us*."¹⁵⁷ While Paul's theopoetic sensibility trumps systematic specifics,

¹⁵³ Paul, in O'Brien, "Beyond Sensation," 75.

¹⁵⁴ Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 136. Aetiology: "The investigation or attribution of the cause or reason for something, often expressed in terms of historical or mythical explanation." *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/aetiology> (Accessed 19 September 2018).

¹⁵⁵ Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 136.

¹⁵⁶ Paul writes: "A lover imitating the handwriting of the beloved in order to understand his being in the world is like one (artist or scientist) who looks for the Creator in the growth of a tree." *Ibid.*, 136-137.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 137. (Italics in original). This phrase is from Augustine's *Sermo* 128.4. The extension of this phrase reads in the passage: "So in order for you to love God, let God dwell in you, and love himself by means of you; [or "through you (*amet se de te*)"]." John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St Augustine* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1938; 2007), 176. "...that is, let him prompt you to love him, kindle you, enlighten you, rouse you." *Sermo* 128.4. In *The works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century Sermons III/4 (94A-147A) on the New Testament*, trans. by Edmund Hill, O.P. ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (New York: New City Press, 1992), 295. According to John Banbury, this phrase is related to Augustine's "central conception of union with God." Referring to the Apostle Paul: "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St Augustine*, 176. This phrase is grounded in thinking through the notion that 'love is a gift of God,' and only "*through the holy spirit that has been given to us* (Rom 5.5)." *Sermo* 128.4, in *The works of Saint Augustine*. (Italics original). "Only God can give himself to us." Tarsicius J. van Bavel, "Love as the Gift of God" in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing CO., 1999), 515.

Augustine's phrase on the nature of union with God, conveys a relational understanding of divine connectedness with the world, in the sense of God giving God's self to the world.

Paul's subject-object theo(poetic)logic

Paul outlines her theological (or theopoetic) phenomenology as follows: "As a painter/poet I sometimes feel like a sieve or fine skin on the natural world which presses through my consciousness. A lover/receiver."¹⁵⁸ This is a telling statement that she first expressed in an interview in 1984 with feminist cultural critic Lita Barrie. In conversation with Barrie, she continues: "the world is coming in at me. Through me, and passing out, I'm digesting it, putting it out, passing it out...being a medium for 'thing' and 'world' out there."¹⁵⁹ Paul's relationship with the world here finds expression in the processes of perception and consciousness through her practice.¹⁶⁰ She described this as a "circular process" or an "interreaction:" of "vesting the outside with the inside," of bringing herself to the object and then giving back to the viewer.¹⁶¹

Paul would often express the importance of this connectedness to the world through her art practice.¹⁶² There is also the sense that the world asks something of her also. She cites Rainer Maria Rilke to make her point: "*Earth, is it not just this that you want: to arise invisibly in us?...Earth, you darling, I will!*"¹⁶³ Paul not only feels a sense of

¹⁵⁸ Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 137.

¹⁵⁹ Paul, interview by Barrie, n.p.

¹⁶⁰ O'Brien describes Paul's concerns with landscape painting "as a way of investigating perception and spirituality." O'Brien, "Beyond Sensation," 75. Trevelyan confirms this view. For Paul, drawing was "...a site of inquiry and invention – a means of exploring her spiritual relationship with the world around her, and investigating the very nature of consciousness." Trevelyan, "To see the moment is to farewell it," 8.

¹⁶¹ Paul, interview by Barrie, n.p. "Interreaction" was Barrie's word that Paul affirmed.

¹⁶² Paul states, "...I think our connection with the worldly environment is a very crucial one and that is the thing we risk losing now..." Paul, interview by Barrie, n.p.

¹⁶³ From "The Ninth Elegy" of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* in Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 137. A note on Rilke's angels contextualises this phrase. Rilke writes: "The 'angel' of the elegies has nothing to do with the angel of the Christian heaven (rather with the angel figures of Islam)...The angel of the Elegies is that creature in whom the transformation of the visible into the invisible, which we are accomplishing, appears already consummated...The angel of the Elegies is that being who vouches for the recognition in the invisible of a higher order of reality. Hence 'terrible' to us, because we, its lovers and transformers, do still cling to the visible. All the worlds of the universe are plunging into the invisible as into their next deepest reality...in the sense of the Elegies, we are these transformers of the earth; our entire existence, the flights and plunges of our love, everything qualifies us for this task (beside

connection with her surroundings, but she intuits a call and response from the earth. To add an omitted phrase to Rilke's lines, the earth not only calls for our attention, but a depth of participation: "What is your urgent command, if not transformation?"¹⁶⁴ This phrase has an eschatological aura: that which would see the purpose of human relationship to the earth fulfilled in relation with the divine. Previous lines of Rilke's "Ninth Elegy" clarify this sense of connection that Paul feels:

Is not the secret intent
of this discreet Earth to draw lovers on,
so that each and every thing is delight within their feeling?¹⁶⁵

Here Paul is alluding to the subject / object logic of late Romanticism. The task of the poet, according to Rilke, was to "save the visible, outer world from complete meaninglessness, by taking it into his own soul."¹⁶⁶ In this view, ordinary everyday things will be renewed or transfigured through this process of inner vision. As an illustration, Gary Lachman writes that Angel of Rilke's *Elegies* "[would] not be impressed by any supernatural display, but that we should rather offer him some mundane item, a jug, a rope, a bridge, provided it has been transfigured by our *bringing it within*."¹⁶⁷

To explain this relationship between herself and the world, Paul follows Rilke with the subject/object logic found in lines by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "*Everything that is in the object is in the subject and something more. Everything that is in the subject is in the object and something more.*"¹⁶⁸ This claim exhibits a correspondence between the objective world and human subjectivity. Paul is seeking a way to explain the way her practice exhibits a relation between her sense of inner and outer experience. Paul's reference to Goethe places her within the lineage of Romanticism, with a subject /object

which there exists, essentially, no other)." Rilke, Letter to Witold von Hulewicz, Sierrc, November 13, 1925, in *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Vol. Two 1910–1926, trans. by Jane Bannard Greene and M.D. Herter Norton (New York, W W Norton & Company: 1949), 375-376.

¹⁶⁴ From "The Ninth Elegy" of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. Viewed at <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/Rilke.php> (accessed 15 May 2018).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Lachman, "Bees of the invisible," n.p.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Goethe in Paul, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer," 137. (Paul's italics)

logic that defined an approach to the natural sciences.¹⁶⁹ Bernard Kuhn expands upon this logic in relation to the natural sciences: “For Goethe, the scientist and the world encounter *each other* as historical, dynamically evolving subjects and objects, each governed by the same laws.”¹⁷⁰ Kuhn explains that Goethe’s “concrete thinking” or “object-like thinking,” is a type of thinking through and with the object, as an “attached perspective” on the world.¹⁷¹ All this would have resonated with Paul, who repeatedly commented on this notion of connectedness: “Things always have a lot to say to me, so I like to think they have something to say through me.”¹⁷²

In another attempt to provide an example of this relationship Paul admits to being a Jungian in the sense that she “find[s] images of the *soul* out there...”¹⁷³ In the same way Paul drew on Rilke, she also sees in Jung’s archetypes a strong “sense of correspondence between inner and outer...”¹⁷⁴ Paul provides a summary statement: “All my films, poems, paintings play more or less between inner and outer events.”¹⁷⁵

Paul also located this correspondence in haiku poetry. Whyte reads Lonie’s reference to the awkward match, between “domesticity and the pleasures of spirituality...”¹⁷⁶ as a characteristic of Western thought. But for Paul, haiku is a mode of poetry that in Whyte’s words, is no less than “a celebration of ‘spirit’ in simple, everyday and ordinary language.”¹⁷⁷ For Paul, Matsuo Basho’s (1644-1694) haiku is a penultimate example of this “something more” within her quotidian phenomenology.¹⁷⁸ In Basho, we also find numerous references to the colour white.¹⁷⁹

¹⁶⁹ See Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, the Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 312.

¹⁷⁰ Bernard Kuhn, *Autobiography and Natural Science in the Age of Romanticism: Rousseau, Goethe, Thoreau* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 83.

¹⁷¹ Kuhn, *Autobiography and Natural Science in the Age of Romanticism*, 85.

¹⁷² Paul “Web of Living,” n.p.

¹⁷³ Paul, “On Not Being a Catholic Writer,” 137. (Paul’s italics).

¹⁷⁴ Paul, “On Not Being a Catholic Writer,” Draft paper. MS-Papers-9473.

¹⁷⁵ Paul, “Joanna Paul: Shibusha,” 10.

¹⁷⁶ Lonie, “A view from here,” 25, in Whyte, “A Place for Shadows,” 159. (In Whyte’s thesis he mistakenly attributes Lonie’s phrase to Allie Eagle, after a reading of Paul’s film *Sisterhood* (1975) where Eagle is also present within the film.)

¹⁷⁷ Whyte, “A Place for Shadows,” 159.

¹⁷⁸ Paul, “On Not Being a Catholic Writer,” Draft paper. MS-Papers-9473.

¹⁷⁹ See Basho, *On Love and Barley: Haiku of Basho*, trans by. Lucien Stryk (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 38-39.

Paul's artistic intellect is defined by Trevelyan as "...long accustomed to patient, disciplined observation of the smallest details of that world."¹⁸⁰ Some of Paul's own words elucidate this intensity, as she makes the contrast between the different kinds of responsiveness that might occur in painting:

Part of painting is caressing, you're touching your subject in a sense...and the page can become a symbol for the self in a curious way...I identify with this page, it becomes me in itself...As I draw a line on it...I'm cutting into something which has a palpable life, and the life that I have endowed the fruit on the table [with] disappears as if a sort of bubble has been burst. The life seems to go out of the fruit when I finish the painting, you know, and it is there, sort of caught, on the page itself. So there is a kind of dialogue going on...it's an unconscious and hard-to-find dialogue going on between oneself, the subject and the page.¹⁸¹

Seriality: a way of being in the world

Paul's spiritual relationship with the world finds expression in the processes of perception and consciousness at play in her commitment to a continuity of vision. Ian Wedde finds this "exchange" or "transmission" between the object and subject, especially evident in Paul's works in series, with the idea that "serial repetition erases the outlines of both subject and object...a viewpoint – not an essence, but a way-of-looking."¹⁸² He believed Paul was ahead of her time, with her "intuitive and intensely meditated grasp of the serial nature of existence...[and the recognition] that perception is renewable at any point."¹⁸³

Paul was not concerned with the strict representation of an object or scene, but rather "representation as a process,"¹⁸⁴ as Wedde puts it. He describes Paul's intentionally "hesitant" "declamations" of the conventional demarcations between viewer and view,

¹⁸⁰ Trevelyan, "To see the moment is to farewell it," 14.

¹⁸¹ Paul, interview by Barrie, n.p.

¹⁸² Ian Wedde, "Resisting Foreclosure" in Joanna Margaret Paul, Bill Milbank and Ian Wedde, *Wanganui Works*, exh. cat. (Wanganui N.Z.: Sarjeant Gallery, 1989), 3.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸⁴ Wedde, "Rain on the Hills" in *beauty, even*, 14.

subject and object, and body and world, in her work.¹⁸⁵ Paul's relationship with the world manifests an art practice that rejects, in Wedde's words, the idea of "grand views and [the artist's] distant command of them."¹⁸⁶

Similarly, Hall likens Paul's way of seeing, to "entering a state of being."¹⁸⁷ For Hall there is a liturgical form to Paul's serial manner of working, which she compares with the Stations of the Cross:

The pauses, like breaths, that slow the passage down, that leave room for meditation...The repetitions, in the subjects of [Paul's] painting, so often the flower, the book, the thread, the window, the frame, the table, the urn. Not seeking variety or change or altering the narrative – more like entering a state of being. An activity that had to be repeated daily. Always making...¹⁸⁸

Paul articulates a two-fold intention for her "characteristically" still life works: they are to be both formal compositions, and "about things with all the symbolic values things hold..."¹⁸⁹ But this is not to say she bestows her subject matter with "symbolic meaning."¹⁹⁰ She was well aware of the weight of art historical genealogies of symbolism or iconography that could be brought to her subject matter. Putting it another way, Lonie reflects on the way "...she worked with the gap between the objects and facts we live with and the ways we feel about what they mean."¹⁹¹

A mediation of the sacred

While Paul resisted the 'grand view,' she wanted the viewer to know they were looking at a painting. The way she rendered the objects and elements of her works, often included lines, window frames, or telephone wires and poles that act as framing devices. Paul explains that the windows and doors in her work evolved as "transitions [that form

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. O'Brien adds, "...Joanna's art upholds the moment of stillness, the easily overlooked detail, the non-event. Presented with a grand vista of forest, Joanna would as likely walk up to it and make a bark rubbing as paint or draw the long view." O'Brien, "'Always quartettish thoughts,'" 30.

¹⁸⁷ Hall, Email correspondence with the author, March 2015.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Paul, "Web of Living," n.p.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Lonie, "Narrowing the Gap," 32.

a] fragile intermediary between [herself] and the world out there.”¹⁹² Paul’s mediatory objects, sometimes acted as mediating devices for the sacred:

For myself as poet I must find some way of expressing the sacredness of what I refuse to name. Tuning to G-d in creation, lakes, river and sea are things sacred so that I am loath sometimes to approach them familiarly. I would not dare or care to climb Mt Ngauruhoe¹⁹³ (the glass mountain of the fairytales) or walk remotely near lakes Roka or Pēti. In deference to a Maori convention which guards their mana with a screen of fern – I prefer to draw the mountains of the desert plateau respectfully behind telegraph poles and wires, scarlet curtains or a screen of trees.¹⁹⁴

Paul does not look to the mountain for some greater experience. Here she respectfully acknowledges the Māori notion of tapu as having a bearing on her spiritual worldview. Her attention to the minor, to everyday lived experience, affirms a vision of immanence over transcendence. Confronted with the sacred (tapu), she draws the everyday (noa) into the frame.¹⁹⁵ Paul’s exploration of the way an artist understands their approach to the divine within the material world might be understood in a holistic sense: a broadly sacramental perspective.

Worldview: a greenness at the heart

As an activist in her later years, Paul drew up arguments against Genetic Engineering, with a kind of religious tone that abhorred any hint of Manichean language. She called for an acknowledgement of the “web of life” which posited a “sacred unity, blue print

¹⁹² Paul in O’Brien, “Beyond Sensation,” 75.

¹⁹³ The summits of the three mountains in Tongariro National Park are tapu: Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe, and Tongariro. The meaning of tapu is expressed as a form of prohibition. A person place or thing that is sacred or holy and often has some kind of spiritual restriction over it. Access to the thing or place is restricted, prohibited or denied. See *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=ta pu> (Accessed 8 June 2018).

¹⁹⁴ Paul, “On Not Being a Catholic Writer,” 138-139.

¹⁹⁵ Noa: 2. (verb) to be free from the extensions of tapu, ordinary, unrestricted, void. *Māori Dictionary*, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=N oa> (Accessed 8 June 2018).

(logos) and balance at the cellular and cosmic level.”¹⁹⁶ She was critically aware of conversations between theology and science that could be brought into discussion with her concerns about Genetic Engineering.¹⁹⁷ In response, she wanted to foster a “habit of deep analogical thinking about the earth;”¹⁹⁸ one that acknowledged “the delicate economies of nature and the human body.”¹⁹⁹ In general, Paul equated ecological crisis with theological crisis and this involved a reorientation of human responsibility: “To adequately respond there needs to be a conversion from an anthropocentric view of ethics to one of serious stewardship of creation.”²⁰⁰ Through her arguments against GE, she marshals various spiritual and theological positions on nature, and human to non-human relations. Paul’s views move towards theologically clarifying her grasp on the inner-outer relations of her approach to her practice.

Writing from her position as an artist, a “Quaker participant” (with the affirmation of “God in everything”), and the “mystical creaturely” tradition of Catholicism, Paul celebrated the inexhaustibility of the natural and visible world at the basic level of observation.²⁰¹ Within this ‘mystical creaturely’ vein of theological tradition, Meister Eckhart, St Francis, and Hildegard of Bingen are mentioned. She saw Hildegard of Bingen as holding a vision of the miraculous that was grounded in the world: as someone “who spoke of the greenness at the heart of creation and of Christ’s greening power.”²⁰²

The Quaker notion of the ‘web of life’ is employed to describe her art practice within a “web of living” in an interview the year she took up the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship at

¹⁹⁶ Paul, “Boundaries: an essay on genetic engineering,” in Joanna Margaret Paul & Other voices, *Consider the Lily: Cultural, theological, & rational arguments against Genetic engineering of Life* (Unpublished manuscript, MS-Papers-9473-212. Paul, Joanna, 1945-2003: Papers. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand).

¹⁹⁷ One of the last projects she worked on before her untimely death was a collection of essays, poetry and images, by her and a selection of other thinkers she invited to participate. This project was never published and had various working titles: *Mischief in Creation* and *Consider the Lily: cultural, theological and rational arguments against Genetic engineering of Life*. While I do not want to get side-tracked by her political activism, (her friends and family were often perplexed by her views, yet admired her certitude), it is within some of these documents Paul outlines her theological attitude to her relationship with nature.

¹⁹⁸ Paul, “Boundaries,” n.p.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Paul, “What are the Churches Saying about Genetic Engineering?,” n.p.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Paul, *Consider the Lily*, MS-Papers-9473 – 212.

Otago University in 1983.²⁰³ An anonymous transcribed Quaker testimonial within Paul's collection of documents in her *Consider the Lily* (c. 2000) project, elaborates:

Let us recognise the diversity of life, its interdependence and balance. The inherent wisdom of life astounds us. From cells to ecosystems we see a self-organising, self-repairing, co-operative whole. Our human focus needs to be widened to encompass the whole web of life.²⁰⁴

*The thisness of things and the oneness of things*²⁰⁵

Paul saw in science the potential to “evoke awe” in the “recognition of the teleological fitness of living systems discerned in detail,” that did not conflict with her view of religion: as “both discuss Being.”²⁰⁶ Here emerges the philosophical relation between the One and the Many. For her, “the inscrutability of God ([and] the fundamental complexity of nature)” was inherent to the teleology of the cosmos: “a telos” she writes, “that GE ipso facto teases and destroys.”²⁰⁷ Paul expressed an interest in the geneticist Barbara McIntock, who with her own kind of mystical sensibility, held a respect for knowledge beyond what scientific enquiry could access. Paul was attracted to McIntock's notion of the “oneness of things”:

‘Basically, everything is one. There is no way in which you [can] draw a line between things... I think maybe poets...have some understanding of this.’ The ultimate descriptive task, for both artists and scientists, is to “ensoul” what one sees, to attribute to it the life one shares with it; to learn by identification.²⁰⁸

Paul was attracted by the pantheistic tone of thinkers, like John Scotus Eriugena and Baruch Spinoza, with a refusal to separate God from nature: “God's existence, essence

²⁰³ Paul, “Web of Living,” n.p.

²⁰⁴ This was written up as a Quaker conviction as part of a testimony on Environmental Sustainability. Kapiti Yearly Meeting (no date), in Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p.

²⁰⁵ Paul, “Cherished Nature,” in *Mischief in Creation*, n.p.

²⁰⁶ Paul, “Boundaries: an essay on genetic engineering,” n.p.

²⁰⁷ Paul writes, “Quite what is the connection between God and nature has and will be given a thousand formulations but that there is a continuity is not to be questioned.” Paul, “What are the Churches Saying about Genetic Engineering?” n.p.

²⁰⁸ Evelyn Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company), 204, cited in Paul, *Mischief in Creation*, n.p.

and act of making are ontologically one and the same.”²⁰⁹ Following this vein of thought she rejected the idea of inanimate nature imposed upon by the human mind. Paul’s idiosyncratic and poetic turn on theology comes through when she muses over whether “DNA [is] the very process by which word becomes flesh...”²¹⁰ following John Scotus Eriugena’s “eternal procession of the Word by ‘generation.’”²¹¹ “Is the process of Nature the process of God?” she writes.²¹²

Paul’s love for the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and her inclusion of Duns Scotus in her theological arguments against GE, emphasises the role of wonder in her understanding of and relation to the world. This reflects her spiritual sensibility. A sensibility that

...springs from a sense of the oneness of things and wonder at the uniquely different order of each living thing. As a child I felt a kind of rapture @ the beauty of a young pear tree. As a painter I’ve been drawn continuously to the behaviour of trees – the lovely angles and intervals repeated among branches and twigs, and peculiar to each species.²¹³

Paul reflects on Hopkins’s (much loved) poem, with its reference to the incarnation, *As kingfishers catch fire...*²¹⁴ writing: “This poem is a profound statement of the specificity of things, what makes each thing itself and not another: the I AM in all things. This Jesuit poet writes from his own first hand wonder and hard looking...”²¹⁵ She goes on to cite Hopkins’s journal entries of observational descriptions of specific attributes of ash

²⁰⁹ Cited in Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p. A fuller translation reads: “God’s existence and essence and His act of making are ontologically one and the same, and all the predicates we apply to God really signify the one incomprehensible super-Essence.” John Scotus Eriugena, *De divisione naturae (the Division of Nature)*, I, 77, 75, in Frederick Copleston, *History of Philosophy Volume 2: Medieval Philosophy* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 121.

²¹⁰ Paul, “Cherished Nature,” n.p.

²¹¹ Cited in Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p.

²¹² Paul, “Cherished Nature,” n.p.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

trees and oaks.²¹⁶ Paul was impressed by Hopkins's ability to build "a language-equivalent to precise observation."²¹⁷

Through Hopkins, we find a mention of the part that wonder has to play in Paul's observation of the world. I believe wonder was an implicit part of her poetic/painterly sensibility overall; part of her 'intense responsiveness' to the visual world. From this position, Paul's sensibility supports a wider conversation that intersects the domains of aesthetics and theology, and a type of enchantment grounded in lived experience and attentiveness.

Paul goes on to locate the influence of John Duns Scotus in Hopkins, referring to the concept *haecceity* or *thisness*, and the preference of love, over reason as a defining characteristic of "man in the image of God."²¹⁸ She writes: "love recognizes while reason [referring to Aquinas] classifies. Love recognises the particular – [and following Hopkins's turn of phrase] *this* face; *this* rose."²¹⁹ Paul also found in Scotus a resistance towards dualism in his concept of the soul: "the form of the body, present in every particle..."²²⁰ The kind of relationship to the world that she found in Scotus appealed to her: she saw an emphasis on subjectivity ("I feel, I know, I recognise") in relationship ("as love and reason") with the world: "we can't step aside and pretend to be objective mind dealing with and disposing of inanimate nature."²²¹ Paul's reflections on several concepts that belonged to Scotus were brief, and used in defence of a generalised celebration of the wonders of the natural world. Lastly, in a poetic turn of phrase, she draws upon Scotus's term "virtue" that she saw as useful for discerning "the being in and of an animal – vegetable – or fish or flower."²²² Virtue, for her, was the "intrinsic

²¹⁶ For example, Paul cites Hopkins's Journal entries from *ASH* (1871), which is a detailed and specific description of knotted wood: "the staff of each of these branches is closely knotted with the places where buds are or have been, so that it is something like a finger which has been tied up with string, and keep the marks..." Hopkins's Journal (1871) in *Ibid.* And then another journal entry on July 19: "I have now found the law of oak leaves...It is of platter-shaped stars altogether; the leaves lie close like pages, packed..." Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p.

²¹⁷ Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p.

²¹⁸ Paul, "Cherished Nature," n.p.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

usefulness and power” of a thing – and “Smell, taste, touch and sight are the index to the nature, the virtue of a thing.”²²³

The collection of essays that Paul marshalled against genetic engineering, contains references to a myriad of classic theological texts. Paul’s whole project was orientated “against a manichean ideology where nature is debased to raw material...”²²⁴ She was concerned with the conceiving of an appropriate human relation with nature which acknowledged the interconnectedness and integrity of nature. She begins with reference to early creation myths, the Hebrew creation story of man emerging from the ground: as “groundlings.”²²⁵ She cites an array of archetypal figures and narratives that exemplify a hubristic move to displace God: King Midas, the “dangerous activity of alchemists,” Phaethon, Icarus, Babel, Faust.²²⁶ Poems by Jewish mystics²²⁷ and reflections on Māori cosmology²²⁸ are interspersed with her own, and others’ poems and drawings. She also launches a biblical defence.²²⁹ She shows an interest in 20th Century theologians who could be drawn upon in support of her argument. She refers to Teilhard de Chardin, a thinker who in Paul’s words, went “...beyond the personal to a mystical view of the cosmos.”²³⁰ At one point she imaginatively draws an argument from the notion of transubstantiation: notions of substance and essence are explored as she concludes that GE “is the wrong type of transubstantiation.”²³¹ Paul was a creative thinker, and she

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Paul, “Boundaries: an essay on genetic engineering,” n.p.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Rabbi Kook (1865–1935), Rebbe Hahman (1772–1810). Rabbi Shamaï Kanter, Rabbi Arthur Green and Rabbi James S Diamond are also cited. Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p.

²²⁸ In support of her argument Paul cites Māori belief and cosmology. A loose page within her documents refers to a text by Aroha Te Pareake Mead, “Sacred Balance” in *He Pukenga Kōrero: A Journal of Māori Studies*, vol. 3 no. 2, (1998), 22-28 in Paul, *Consider the Lily*, loose paper. “...Every living being, in its smallest microbial form is descended from Ranginui and Papatūānuku. Far from being a vague notion. Maori *whakapapa* is very detailed. Every species of marine life, every plant and animal endemic to this region can be tracked to Ranginui and Papatūānuku. Māori traditional knowledge of both the genealogy and properties of species and natural conditions is equivalently detailed....My heritage teaches me about concepts such as the integrity and the inter-dependency of living things. It makes me quite comfortable with the notion that as a human being, I am but one part of a whole and that my generation is also simply one strand in the rope of humanity.” Aroha Te Pareake Mead, “Sacred Balance,” 23.

²²⁹ Paul cites the following texts: Gen 9:5-6; Deut 22:6-7; Mathew 6:26-30; John 12: 32; Gen 1:11; Gen 6:12-14; Gen 6:19-20; Gen 7:2; Gen 9:11; Lev 19:23; Lev 19:9; Lev 26: 6-20. Paul, “Boundaries: an essay on genetic engineering,” n.p.

²³⁰ Paul, “Boundaries: an essay on genetic engineering,” n.p.

²³¹ Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p.

saw in the notion of the sacramental, an implication for her argument: “Christ as blueprint, Logos and ‘first born of everything that comes into the *world is creation, is the bread, is the wine*. Is the child; is the lamb.”²³²

Pascal Harris (Paul’s son) confirms this awareness of a “spiritual quality in things” in the manner Paul understood, “what makes a thing a thing. / There is a drawing called ‘pearness’. She grasped the divinity of the nature of object, / animate and inanimate. / This is why the idea of genetic engineering was an outrage to her. / Tampering with the pearness of a pear...” (see ref. 59, fig. 19).²³³ While Paul’s specific position against genetic engineering is somewhat controversial in light of its benefits, the conceptual framework that forms her argument, presents a thorough picture of her spiritual worldview in general.

Conclusions

One of Paul’s later series, *Frugal Pleasures* (1999, ref. 60-61, fig. 20-21), is a celebratory inventory of everyday objects, which marks the tension she maintained between emotion and spirit, where the ordinary is endowed with life. At the breakfast table one morning, Horace’s *Satires*, resonated with the scene:

I go out alone. I check the price of vegetables and grain. I wander into the frivolous circus of an evening and after into the Forum. I stop at the soothsayer. Then I return home to a dish of fritters, chickpeas and leeks. My dinner is served by three slaves. And the white marble table carries two wine cups and a ladle. There is a cheap salt cellar and a bowl and an oil flask from [Campania]. Then I sleep... (Horace)²³⁴

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Pascal Harris, “Light on Things: Joanna Margaret Paul,” (Dunedin: Brett McDowell Gallery, 2016), n.p. In Paul’s memory, her son Pascal Harris curated an exhibition of her works in 2016 at the Brett McDowell Gallery. The accompanying catalogue was written in a poetic form that continued the conversations in which Paul had been engaged. (I was not able to find the particular work that Harris refers to but did locate an image of pears).

²³⁴ Horace, *Satires* I. 6. 111–119, in Joanna Margaret Paul, *Frugal Pleasures*. 1999, watercolour on paper, David & Keren Skegg Deposit, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, Dunedin. Campania: a location that produced plain everyday pottery.

In her writing on *Frugal Pleasures*, Paul addresses the blurring of boundaries of nature and culture and the sacred and profane. Harking back to her thoughts on the relation between science and theology, she channels Hopkins, writing: “Organic knobbly things seemed doubly precious in a world of supermarket uniformity &, under the long shadow of genetic engineering, spoke of a ‘vanished simple good.’”²³⁵ The lines of Latin read across the nine works, “like a rhyme.”²³⁶ Upon a table that “hints of ceremony, even if it is not marble,” Paul writes of a tension between “wealth [and] frugality.”²³⁷ This series also reflects her ‘sacramental theology’ of ‘feeling and restraint,’ and ultimately states a political position that sees the “simple good” under threat.²³⁸ These works are luminous without the characteristic matt finish of the gaps of white paper. Here her work confirms, as Trevelyan writes, Paul’s desire to “make ‘bright patches’ in her art and life, domains of sensitivity and positive energy.”²³⁹

Often working with the mediatory nature of the ceremonial space of a kitchen table top, or the transitional frame of a windowpane, Paul’s practice was founded on attentiveness to her surroundings: to the intervals between tree branches, or the tiny pocketed curls of the shell of a walnut, or the mottled skin of a pear, framed through a lens or transcribed with deliberate mark making and placement of colour, allowing the presence of white to activate her work. Her poetic vision encompassed a wonder at the natural world, mediated through an equilibrium of the domestic and the religious. A feminist everyday aesthetic and the modern phenomenological vision of Bachelard coalesce through her practice.

Paul abhorred any hint of Manichaeism, placing herself within a non-hierarchical view that affirmed the specificity of things, or the ‘thingness of things.’ At the same time a notion of mediation enters her work through her approach to the sacred through the everyday. Her use of white, as a ‘lens of religious intuition,’ alongside the notion of

²³⁵ Paul, “The Vanished Simple Good, (Joanna Margaret Paul writes of the making of this series of paintings),” *Takahe*, (Apr 2000), 35.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Trevelyan, “To see the moment is to farewell it,” 13.

kenosis, and a sense of the apophatic, match her visual attentiveness to detail through her personally located inner-outer relation with the world.

In reading Paul's approach to her immediate environment, and taking hints from her theological interests, a broadly defined sacramental sensitivity emerges, with a hierarchical and yet panentheistic worldview. She appears to affirm an immanent worldview, with the Quaker understanding of God in everyone/everything, yet she holds to a sacramental position, within the Roman Catholic tradition, resting on liturgical forms and often employing mediatory devices in her work.

Paul's practice is a poetic celebration of the material world, which attested to a precise connection and attentiveness to her everyday encounters. This pronounced life/art connection, acknowledges the heritage of second wave cultural feminism, and is a testament to an embodied spirituality. Hers was a literary and visual sensibility that inhabited the ordinary at the threshold of wonder – an orientation of vision that engendered a notion of enchantment through attentive engagement with the everyday. Paul didn't often directly approach a sense of the sacred. As curator Alexa Johnston puts it, she rarely "[tackled] religious subject matter head-on. There is a natural mysticism in her painting and poetry which offers glimpses of a mystery at the heart of ordinary things, a cause for rejoicing. She achieves a seemingly effortless celebration of life; that it is good to be part of it all, whatever pain it may bring."²⁴⁰

This chapter is a summary of evidence for Paul's religious and spiritual disposition which, as I go on to argue, engenders a theopoetics of lived experience. In wishing to respect the integrity of Paul's unique sensibility, I have not attempted any wider interdisciplinary engagement here in order to preserve an accurate representation of her practice. In the following chapters I consider the wider context of the theological traditions that interested her, while also seeking to take seriously her art historical situation. Her orientation of vision or visual responsiveness, that she called her responsibility to the world, elicits a relational worldview that embodies a sense of enchantment with the everyday. I go on to focus on the spiritual basis of her ecological

²⁴⁰ Alexa M. Johnston "Christianity in New Zealand Art" in *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, ed. Mary Barr, (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992), 102.

concerns and the historical situation of a feminist everyday aesthetics as expressions of a relational poetics and “apophatic entanglement.”²⁴¹ I conclude my study on Paul with a closer look at the theological content that emerges from her work, which helps explain her sensibility, and reads (theo)poetically.

²⁴¹ Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 7.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Reading the poetics of Joanna Margaret Paul

Introduction

I approach Paul's practice as a form of theopoetics in which theological and theoretical "...lines / converge /," in her words, "at the centre / not the middle / but / just outside / the picture..."¹ I call upon the assistance of thinkers associated with the theological traditions with which her work aligned itself, as well as specific thinkers she cited in her own research and reflections on her practice. In this section several interlocutors contribute to a multidisciplinary interchange between theology, political theory and poetics. I adopt a hermeneutic of improvisation for the task of this study, seeking both to avoid a closure of meaning and to prevent the conversation from being insulated within a single disciplinary engagement.

Theological engagement with Paul's art and practice begins with the spiritual and religious references she makes on her own work. Her poetic celebration of the material world, expressed as a form of phenomenological empathy with her everyday surroundings, supports engagement that predominantly focuses on praxis, rather than interpretive readings into her works of art. The connection she maintained between her art and everyday life qualifies this position. In Paul, consciousness and artistic expression converge to reveal an aesthetics, or theopoetics, of everyday encounter – a mysticism of the everyday.

I draw upon a range of thinkers to expand the discussion on key aspects of Paul's sensibility. Each interlocutor differs regarding their use of language, terminology and theoretical positioning within their respective disciplines. These scholars cannot be swept together under the same umbrella towards forming a definitive theological or theoretical position for Paul's practice. However, disparate concerns hang together through sympathetic thematic or content-based connections. The primary concern of this study is Paul's mode of practice in its particularity. In an implicit sense, Paul's work engenders theopoetic expression, where theological perspectives take the form of

¹ Paul, "O" in *Like love poems*, 92. From, "poems: Seacliff June 1973, poems for Mary,"

poetry rather than definitive doctrinal statements, and embodied, personal, lived experience is the location for spiritual experience.

Paul maintained a position on the borders of the artistic disciplines, cultural engagements and religious and theological traditions she pursued. She labelled herself a painter/poet, a housewife/painter, a ‘dissident feminist,’ and a ‘reluctant postmodernist.’ Through empathetically inhabiting her world, I proffer a hermeneutical openness that allows for both theological and contemporary theoretical readings at the borders of her practice and as extensions to her own positioning. I approach the task of reading her work with an openness that embraces difference, rather than negatively criticising it.² Through this approach I hope to guard against any reductionisms that might occur through the proximity of disparate disciplinary concerns, historical contexts and theoretical and theological orientations. I hope also to avoid simply making thematic connections between thinkers, but to consider the individual contributions of each conversation partner in turn as carrying interpretive weight that relates to Paul’s concerns.

For Paul, a concept of connectedness manifested a life’s work that attests to an intense connectivity with her surroundings: ordinary everyday objects, the intimate spaces of the home, nature and the people in her life. Paul’s practice demonstrates a hermeneutical principle in the sense that it was an explicit mode for experiencing the world. The quotidian as a site for spiritual experience emerges as a primary category for interpreting her work. This includes the hesitant validation (for Paul) of feminist and postmodern concerns, and of maintaining an interpretative project, (on my part), that historically situates her practice within these concerns. The basic theme of hermeneutics as “transformation through understanding” through engagement with otherness forms a double spiral of Paul’s and my own understandings.³ I read Paul’s art and practice for the way she reveals theological tradition and spiritual concepts, and how she subsequently alters understandings of these concepts. She herself was also engaged with

² See Barad, “Matter Feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers,” 50.

³ Davey, “Hermeneutics and Art Theory,” 439.

the process of ‘transformation through understanding’ through the lived experience of her practice.

A feminist hermeneutic of lived experience supports an exploration of the spiritual in the everyday. A connection between socio-ecological ethics and aesthetics is emphasised through affirming the significance of embodiment, relationality and community. A feminist hermeneutic also upholds a transformational ethics. Feminist theology names the significance of lived experience for doing theology that is community centred. A feminist hermeneutic that privileges lived experience for doing art history, reading art or making art has the same goal of transforming understandings. Feminist critique of art history also seeks to transform the landscape of established hierarchies and binary systems of the cultural establishment that had a history of excluding women. Paul’s practice that emerged from her domestic lived experience exemplifies one of the strategies that women adopted to disrupt the hierarchy of modern art. With regard to the spiritual aspect of her practice, this strategy might be defined in terms of a theopoetic. In this sense, theopoetics could be considered as a specific iteration of feminist theological aesthetics.

Paul’s eco-activist arguments against Genetic Engineering reveal her interest in theology, and her emphasis upon the importance of wonder at the world, the interconnectedness of the world, and the ontological ‘thingness’ or particularity of things in the world. Knowledge of Paul’s interest in philosophy, and her references to phenomenology in her practice, provide support for this analysis. Reading her work alongside the phenomenological project of Bachelard opens a way of considering Paul’s poetics in a wholistic sense, and guards against compartmentalising her practice within disparate disciplines.

The notion of enchantment or re-enchantment, within eco-orientated critical theory is another position from which to embark upon theological conversation. Paul’s interest in the wonder of things discerned in detail, and her attentiveness to her material environment supports this approach. A theopoetic that encompasses postmodern spirituality, eco-feminist spirituality, relational theology, is an interpretive direction I explore to contextualise Paul’s interests.

As stated, Paul's reflections on the spiritual in her work are also informed by her affiliation with the church: Presbyterian, Catholic, Quaker. In connection with her religious practice, she writes of a "sacramental theology" in her poems, that treads a line between "feeling and restraint."⁴ In her words, "a distrust of extravagance" meets "a liking for the holding forms of ritual and liturgy and poetry," in Catholicism.⁵

Paul's work can be considered within a panentheistic or broadly sacramental view, alongside a formal 'restraint' she interpreted as a kind of reformed protestant aesthetic. Her views on the relationship between spirituality and the material world, were informed by the "catholic mystical tradition of nature in God and God in nature."⁶ She often employed transitional devices, often the window, or a camera lens, to refer to a notion of the mediation of the spiritual, as well as a formal device. At the same time, her direct interface with the world and her interest in the subject matter of her everyday life embodies a relational practice.

Lastly, Paul's use of the white ground, in her image making and her reflections on the significance of colour in her work, reflects both an iconographic and phenomenological relationship with the spiritual. Paul's use of white as a "ground of multiplicity; [and] a lens of religious intuition,"⁷ could be considered a pictorial device in which she frames her religious concerns and attests to a vision "beyond sensation."⁸ Paul's work, for herself and for the viewer, contains visual references for transcendence through her use of white. As noted, the word 'transcendence' is often used by curators and art historians in a generalised sense, without religious or theological specificity. In this chapter, I consider Paul's phenomenology of white space, as a notion of the spiritual in art, through an implicit connection with her lived experience.

The following section is a consideration of the nature of Paul's practice, broadly defined as dynamically relational and ethically, ecologically, and empathetically orientated. My study of Paul's practice is divided into three sections: first, Paul's relational poetics is

⁴ Ibid., 136.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Paul, "What are the Churches Saying about Genetic Engineering?" n.p.

⁷ Paul in Paul and Eagle, "Letters from Room to Room," 93.

⁸ Paul in O'Brien, "Beyond Sensation," 75.

considered through an historical and theoretical contextualisation of her artistic practice;
second, her interest in whiteness is explored as a phenomenologically defined notion;
and third, a concluding chapter draws the strands of discussion together and emphasises
a way of reading her work as a theopoetic gesture.

O

Something about

being

at the centre

of a

big floury rose

tilted back

All lines

converge

At the centre

Perspective

(Alberti's

isn't true

We've all

heard of

gravity

Earth

O

Apple

Eve

I

O

Thou

[...]

(look look
it's in
my pictures
all lines
converge
at the centre
not the middle
but
just outside
the picture
here
O)

[...]

egg
oval
& not a
printers O
we only know
the circle
by its
absence
whiteness
perfection
ditto
ontology by
zero

the oval
earth
shaped by
forces
preponderant

[...]

O
I O thou
who
completes
the
arc
of the
sea
but
thou O eye

Shaking of
the seed
not to generation
turgid round
(I can't get off the page)
not in the
wind in the
earthquake
in the rushing
fire
shaking
at the

still
small
o
an ear
to hear
a seed
to bed
& bleed
a word
to grow
hip
at the
centre
of the rose
O

[...]

Paul's relational poetics

The phenomenology of intimate space

The lines above are an abridged version of a poem penned by Paul in the early 1970s.⁹ The poem seems to contain a representational selection of imagery from her life's practice as a painter/poet. In part, it reads as a concrete poem – the visual representation in the o, or zero, or circle – and it begins with the image of a rose. Lines from the poem also correspond to her visual practice, or her approach to composing a picture: “(look look / it's in/ my pictures/ all lines/ converge/ at the centre/ not the middle/ but/ just outside/ the picture/ here/ O)”¹⁰

⁹ “O” in *Like love poems*, 91-96.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

God is referred to directly in two instances. In the first instance, the phrase “God is /his own / housekeeper/” is enigmatic. In another stanza of the same poem, Paul refers to the still small voice of God encountered by the prophet Elijah.¹¹ In the poem, the still small *o*, as the voice of God, as a *seed* planted, as a *word* that grows, is found in the *centre of the rose*. The O in the poem is a shifting signifier. Associations float between its use as an exclamation, as a circle, as an egg, as the earth, as an apple, or the centre of a rose. Sometimes this cypher sits as an intermediary between the self and the other: *I O Thou*.

Paul returned again and again to flowers. Writing in the spirit of Cixous’s *écriture féminine* she situates herself at the centre of the poem “O,” in the centre of a rose, and, considered imaginatively, within a seedbed of memory. Here I borrow one of Bachelard’s choice of poets, Jean Laroche, who writes: “(This peony is an empty house / In which each of us recaptures night.)”¹² Paul’s flowers are icons within the furnishings of her everyday life. For Paul, flowers often encompassed personal and religious import, and she was aware both of the loaded symbolic heritage attached to their use in her work, and of the feminist recontextualisation of her activity with this subject matter. Through correlating the flowers and the phenomenology of the house, Bachelard names the flower as an abode for the poet dreamer that approaches infinity:

When we have dreamed as intensely as this in the hollow of a flower, the way we recall our lives in the house that is lost and gone, dissolved in the waters of the past, is no ordinary way.¹³

A distilled example of this sensibility is found in another of Paul’s poems, where the house itself is alive, not only as an extraordinary recollection of a childhood home at night, but dreaming of a house as the inhabitation of memory:

¹¹ See 1 Kings 19:12.

¹² Jean Laroche in Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 55.

¹³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 55.

The city sky at night is not black

PALOMA¹⁴

In my window a white house

turns

its square pale brow

diffuse lights from the city

define no contours

cut out house not stuck on but

blank in the dimness

A boxed in porch

juts out an outside light

shapes & sharpens a window

to the point of recollection --

8 square panes & the clear creases of curtains:

grey dark grey night white

[...]

House

you live when light jumps to an

upstairs window

3 am

someone wakes from the forest

sees the abandoned book shelves step

forward

pulls the real doll to her bosom

and turns down

white paths to childhood¹⁵

¹⁴ Paloma is Spanish for dove, which is also a symbol for the Holy Spirit.

¹⁵ This an excerpt (verse i and part of verse iii) from Paul, "The city sky at night is not black," or "Paloma" in *Like Love Poems*, 28-29. From 'poems: Seacliff June 1973, poems for Mary.' And "WINDOWS / NO WINDOWS" in "night & snow, poems 1972/1973, poems for Mary." In *A Women's*

Bachelard privileges the house as the primary site for a phenomenological understanding of the principles of intimate space.¹⁶ Citing the house as such, and in understanding the cosmic dimension of a house, (he defines this in the sense that the house is “our corner of the world,”) Bachelard refers to poetry as the conduit in which we might connect with “the ultimate poetic depth of the space of the house.”¹⁷ Paul puts it another way: “That what we daily look at becomes cosmos, carries memory...”¹⁸ Paul’s embodied practice sought a connection between art and life through a poetics of the house. The notion of dreaming is a form of inhabiting intimate space. Her use of everyday objects as cyphers or symbols for the self, or others, also exhibits a notion of connectivity within domestic space.

In reference to the house as a container of memory, Bachelard assigned the term, topoanalysis, as a psychological study of intimate life, or the “topography of our intimate being...by remembering ‘houses’ and ‘rooms,’ we learn to ‘abide’ within ourselves.”¹⁹ Between a phenomenology of the imagination,²⁰ and a phenomenology of the soul²¹ Bachelard concludes that poetry “...can therefore be taken as a clear maxim of a phenomenology of the soul.”²² The ontology of the poetic image is approached by Bachelard through a direct experience of encounter he describes as reverberation, in which “the poetic image will have a sonority of being.”²³ Relying on the poetic turn of

Picture Book, Paul titles this poem “Paloma” 1971. Paul in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 92.

¹⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6. “As has often been said, [the house] is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.” Ibid., 4.

¹⁸ Paul, “A Passionate Pilgrimage in Time” in *brief* 32, 5.

¹⁹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xxxii; xxxiii. Bachelard elaborates: “With the house image we are in possession of a veritable principle of psychological integration. Descriptive psychology, depth psychology, psychoanalysis and phenomenology could constitute, with the house, the corpus of doctrines that I have designated by the name of topo-analysis. On whatever theoretical horizon we examine it, the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being.” Ibid., xxxii.

²⁰ Which Bachelard explains as “a study of the phenomenon of the poetic image when it emerges into the consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul and being of man, apprehended in his actuality.” Ibid., xiv.

²¹ For Bachelard, following Pierre-Jean Jouve, “Poetry is a soul inaugurating a form.” Pierre-Jean Jouve, *En miroir* (Mercure de France, 1954), 11, in Ibid., xviii.

²² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xviii. Bachelard goes on to write: “...there is ground for taking the house as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul.” Ibid., xxxiii.

²³ Ibid., xii. The term *reverberation* – as the experience of a poetic image or “in order to determine the being of an image,” and “because of its novelty and its action, the poetic image has an entity and a dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct *ontology*.” Ibid., xii.

phrase as a tool for analysis Bachelard reflects, as an example, on the nature of flowers – the “sonority of being” made explicit – which coincides here with Paul’s artistic sensibility: “Because all flowers speak and sing, even those we draw, and it is impossible to remain unsociable when we draw a flower or a bird.”²⁴

Commenting on her filmmaking, Paul wrote of her preference for her films “in which the camera dreams.”²⁵ One of Bachelard’s poets, Noël Bureau, encapsulates Paul’s visual sensibility: “(Her secret was / Listening to flowers / ... / Wear out their color.)”²⁶ Bureau’s lines are reflected within the aesthetics of Paul’s film *Roses* (1975, ref. 62) where the camera pans a sunlit garden bed of flowers, incrementally moving closer to particular roses – to the point where the camera touches the flower – with a movement that abstracts the image into flashes of intense pink and deep shadow. Towards the end of the sequence, the film emulsion itself is manipulated which translates as brushstrokes of black over pink, abstracting the image and merging the moving image into an energetic photographic drawing. It is as if the roses are singing. In the words of another of Bachelard’s poets: “(You can hear the prattle of the flowers on the screen.)”²⁷ Paul’s film is a celebration of colour, (the colour of one of her icons – the rose) through the deliberate rendering of a film that explores a multidisciplinary connection between drawing and film. It is a dynamic description of connectivity to the essence of her visual material – with an obvious joy, and musical rhythm, the camera unquestionably *dreams*.

Bachelard affirmed that “Poets and painters are born phenomenologists.”²⁸ Paul maintained a phenomenological relationship with the world through her practice; to reiterate: “As a painter/poet I sometimes feel like a sieve or fine skin on the natural world which presses through my consciousness.”²⁹ With this phrase, Paul also considered her phenomenology in terms of spiritual connection to the world, here expressed in the processes of perception and consciousness at play in her practice.

²⁴ Ibid., 177.

²⁵ Paul, “Shibusha,” 10.

²⁶ Noël Bureau, *Les mains tendues*, 29 in Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 177.

²⁷ René-Guy Cadou, *Hélène ou le règne végétal* (Paris: Séghers, 1952), 13, in Ibid., 177.

²⁸ Bachelard, citing, Jan Hendrik Van den Berg, *The Phenomenological Approach in Psychology. An introduction to recent phenomenological psycho-pathology* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1955), 61 in Ibid., xxiv.

²⁹ Paul, “On Not Being a Catholic Writer,” 137.

Barrie expresses this as a form of “interreaction,” an “internal perception” of Paul’s external environment.³⁰ She often expressed this connectedness to the world through her art practice in a haptic sense. In a turn of phrase that draws on her concerns with domestic space, as one would cut through a piece of fruit, and with a visceral intonation, she said: “...and the page can become a symbol for the self ...it becomes me in itself...As I draw a line on it...I’m cutting into something which has a palpable life.”³¹ For Paul “representation” was “a process,” as Wedde describes it: a way of “processing relationship...”³² Paul’s relationship with the world is handed over to us, in an art practice that rejects the idea of expressing a sublime vision of the world and affirms simplicity in her daily relation with the world.

Paul’s situated practice, often within the domestic space of her home, connection with the sensibility of Bachelard’s poetics of transformation, carries sympathetic intonations for the task of reading for theological insight. At a basic level, a poetic sensitivity attuned to and enlivened within domestic space, has a direct impact on daily living itself. Everyday life encompasses a relational ethics that is activated through artistic practice.

The enchantment of everyday life

Paul’s vision as a painter/poet, was also ecologically and politically motivated, where the notion of connectivity with the world was something she was emphatic about communicating. Paul’s sensibility supports a wider conversation that intersects the domains of aesthetics and theology, and a type of enchantment that celebrates attentiveness to everyday living. The spiritual basis of her ecological concerns, and the historical situation of a feminist aesthetic, affirm a postmodern and eco-feminist critical departure point for considering her sensibility in terms of a notion of enchantment or re-enchantment. Within this context, Paul’s practice is a form of theopoetic expression.

To begin with an historical point of departure within the field of theology, I consider an early postmodern definition that saw the notion of enchantment emerge alongside

³⁰ Paul, interview by Barrie, n.p.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Wedde, “Rain on the Hills,” 14.

relational theologies. While Paul preferred to call herself a ‘reluctant postmodernist’ the definition of postmodern spirituality that emerged in the 1980s encapsulates some of the qualities of her vision. David Ray Griffin writes:

Postmodern spirituality [is], in favour of [a kind] of nondualistic spirituality. The reality of spiritual energy is affirmed, but it is felt to exist within and between all nodes in the cosmic web of interconnections....Postmodernists who speak of God generally affirm a naturalistic panentheism, according to which God is in all things and all things are in God...³³

The notion of re-enchantment in this context can be defined by Suzi Gablik’s pioneering vision for “The Re-Enchantment of Art” that valued an “aesthetics of interconnectedness.”³⁴ Privileging a sense of the sacred, this aesthetic moved away from the classification of art as *objects* made or viewed, to art conceived as *relationships*. For Gablik, a relational philosophy that drew from “deep ecology” and “systems theory” informed an embodied “process-orientated” and participatory art.³⁵ Gablik presents examples of artists working within two kinds of postmodernisms and concludes by defining the characteristics of the second kind as “reconstructive” postmodernism which follows this paradigm of art as relationship. Political “effectiveness” is the goal, all best described by the key word: network,³⁶ and informed by recent scientific understandings of the world.³⁷ This kind of art making is described by Gablik as,

³³ David Ray Griffin, *Sacred Interconnections: Postmodern Spirituality, Political Economy, and Art*, ed. David Ray Griffin (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 2. David Ray Griffin’s volume places emphasis on the notion of “interconnectedness” in contributions to art, spirituality, and political culture. A dictionary definition of panentheism reads as follows: “the belief that the being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part of it exists in Him but (as against pantheism) that His Being is more than, and is not exhausted by, the universe.” *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. “panentheism” Ed. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1027 cited in Arthur Peacocke, “Biology and a Theology of Evolution,” *Zygon* 34 (1999): 708.

³⁴ Gablik, “The Reenchantment of Art: Reflections on the Two Postmodernisms,” in *Sacred Interconnections*, 180.

³⁵ Gablik, “Leaving the ‘Culture of Separation:’ New Images of What It Means to Be an Artist,” in *ReVision* vol. 23 no. 4 (Spring 2001): 39.

³⁶ For Gablik, the word “network” is a metaphor for “a new pattern of organization and as a generative force.” Gablik, “Beyond the Disciplines: Art without Boundaries,” *The Hedgehog Review* vol. 6 no. 2 (Summer 04): 64.

³⁷ Gablik writes: “Integrated organization and quantum entanglement are now understood as the underlying structures of the universe. We need to change our basic one-dimensional linear models to

...one that exercises its power to administer the social dreaming, through images which empower the collective unconscious. [...] this means art that speaks to the power of interconnectedness and establishes bonds, art that offers more dynamic and vivid ways of understanding the universe, and thus addresses our culture's failure to grasp what it means to be actively related to the cosmos.³⁸

Ultimately Gablik is concerned with locating a more spiritually orientated way of engaging with reality.³⁹ For her, this is where societal healing and change are located.⁴⁰ Grounded in an understanding of being-in-relation, Gablik's vision is orientated towards empathy or love. Gablik makes sure to state, however, that her project is not some mere return to Romanticism.

Gablik's vision in the 1990s was a precursor to the ways that many contemporary artists are now working.⁴¹ She remains a pioneering figure for a theoretical trajectory that affirms political eco-orientated relationally defined art practice. The notion of enchantment finds renewed traction here, and in a more contemporary setting, within the outworking of new materialisms.⁴² For example, the work of Jane Bennett, in

something more dynamic, branched, and multidimensional – something that is more in harmony with the interconnected nature of the real world. In Zen there is an old saying that expresses this: 'When you pick up one piece of dust, the entire world comes with it.'" Gablik, "Beyond the Disciplines," 71.

³⁸ Gablik, "The Reenchantment of Art," 192.

³⁹ Gablik places greatest emphasis on the notion of shamanism within this model, almost as a spiritual definition of the notion, or at least its underlying spiritual construction. Her basic premise is a return to the sacred and the mythic, which she defines as "...an opening into the numinous, transpersonal dimensions of the psyche (which can be either ecstatic or terrifying), where there is no separation between inner and outer, between "real" and "imagined," where there are no boundaries, so that all things flow into each other. In shamanistic consciousness, the world is not experienced as separate from ourselves..." Ibid., 185.

⁴⁰ Ultimately Gablik has an agenda to "heal community" and the acknowledgement of "a return of art's moral authority." Gablik, "Beyond the Disciplines," 71.

⁴¹ For example, curator Michelle Grabner writes: "Like a seer, the art world has evolved seamlessly, perhaps even magically into [Gablik's] proposition...A precursor to Relational Aesthetics with a feminist bent, it's a prescient tome...Since Gablik penned "Reenchantment," now well over twenty years ago, many artists have critically transitioned their work from "art-for-art's sake assumptions of late modernism which kept art as a specialized pursuit devoid of practical aims and goals" to participatory practices in arenas of interrelationship, porous associations, and discontinuous parts...Gablik's call for hybrid social energies is now a matter of course." Michelle Grabner, "Methodology of the Marvelous" in *Here and there pink melon joy: Sabina Ott* (Chicago: Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, 2014), n.p.

⁴² Curator Michelle Grabner, writing on the artist Sabina Ott, examines the implications of new materialism alongside Ott's work and acknowledges the connection with Gablik's visionary stance. Grabner, in her catalogue essay, draws on Jane Bennett's "enchanted materialism" that echoes a paradigm

conjunction with Gablik, provides an interpretive recontextualisation of romanticism for reading Paul's sensibility. Bennett finds resources within Romanticism for the cultivation of a sensibility for ethical life within a disenchanted world, so long as this alternative tale is maintained with the awareness to avoid any "homesick variant" of Romanticism.⁴³

Bennett's project is valuable, in that it does not proffer an ensouling concept of the divine in nature. She instead affirms a wonder at the specificity, interconnectedness and liveliness of matter itself and locates enchantment on an immanent plane of everyday life: "To be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday."⁴⁴ Bennett's enchantment requires the experience of an *encounter*, while it is also able to be strategically encouraged or generated. She places emphasis on the significance of fostering "sensory receptivity to the marvellous specificity of things..."⁴⁵ An attitude that dovetails with Paul's ethos, but that does not adhere to a spiritual tradition and instead works to undo ontotheological binaries.⁴⁶

I would place Paul's spiritual sensibility somewhere between Gablik and Bennett, but not fully in line with either of them. Inviting Bennett into the conversation places emphasis on the notion of the everyday, which Gablik does not quite emphasise enough. For Bennett, sites of enchantment are also located within the mundane, including human made artefacts. Bennett shifts the emphasis away from nature as the sole inspiration of wonder, to the capacity of human made things or products to mediate modes of enchantment.⁴⁷ She reads Henry David Thoreau as "a master of [this] nature/culture finesse; the world he describes is full of admixtures of the raw and the cooked."⁴⁸

within new materialisms, which affirms the "emergent and generative powers of thingliness..." Grabner, "Methodology of the Marvelous," n.p.

⁴³ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 32.

⁴⁴ Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), x.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

Bennett also draws upon Bruno Latour's "network"⁴⁹ thus making anachronistic the "pure categories" of *nature* and *culture*: "allegedly fixed objects – atoms, birds, trees, operas, nature, identities, culture, turbines, God – are strange and mobile complexes of the given and the made."⁵⁰ The notions of Thoreau's "Wild," and Latour's "hybrids," serve for Bennett as alternative narratives and enablers of a mood of enchantment.⁵¹ Bennett's "mood" of enchantment encompasses the immobilization of wonder in thoroughly affirming the interconnectedness and complexity of the way "'we" are always mixed up with "it," and "it" shares in some of the agency we officially ascribe only to ourselves."⁵²

Bennett also wonders if it might be "worth running the risks associated with anthropomorphizing (superstition, the divinization of nature, romanticism) because it, oddly enough, works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman 'environment.'"⁵³ This emphasis on "cultivating an ability to discern the vitality of matter"⁵⁴ through anthropomorphism has a markedly poetic turn, which chimes with Paul, who writes, "...buildings are also ensouled bodies...the rhythm of columns is the diastole of the heart."⁵⁵ Paul's work *Unpacking the Body*, where the scientific (Latin) language of the body, is correlated with household objects, as she catalogues the body of her deceased daughter, through science and poetry, as part of a grieving process, is another example.

⁴⁹ A definition of "network:" "...assemblage of all sorts of entities, including natural beings, man-made tools, derived theorems, protean urges, background climates, intentional designs, and geographical accidents." Ibid., 98.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 98.

⁵¹ Bennett enlists those of Thoreau and Latour and others for their "alter-tales:" She writes "All such tales are slightly mad, for it is crazy to think that any story could capture the complexity of relations among the beings and becomings in life. This delusion of grandeur is one way to acknowledge the networked quality of existence and of our profound attachment to it." Ibid., 110.

⁵² Ibid., 99. "The human is not a constitutional pole to be opposed to that of the nonhuman....The expression 'anthropomorphic' considerably underestimates our humanity. We should be talking about morphism. Morphism is the place where technomorphisms, zoomorphisms, phusimorphisms, ideomorphisms, theomorphisms, sociomorphisms, psychomorphism, all come together. Their alliances and their exchanges, taken together, are what define the *anthropos*. A weaver of morphisms—isn't that enough of a definition?" Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University), 137, in Ibid., 99.

⁵³ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 119-120.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 119-120.

⁵⁵ Paul, "A Passionate Pilgrimage in Time," 5.

As a site of entanglement, I return to Bachelard's house, as one I think Paul would have liked: romantic and old fashioned, rural perhaps.⁵⁶ In this house, as Harris puts it, "The vase is not just an object. [...] It also contains memories. / It contains emotions. / It contains warmth."⁵⁷ Bachelard, alongside Bennett, shed light on a way of thinking through Paul's relationship with material objects in everyday life as they consider material reality as enlivening. Within the realm of an enchanted everyday, the importance of reading "person-like relations" with material objects emerges as a way of delineating a transformational ethics of relationality.⁵⁸ Stephen Pattison supports this view:

Material relations with artifacts and other objects thus mediate and form part of all human relationships, and not just within formal religion. They vitally inform the tiny cosmologies of meaning whereby modern people create the material and moral patterns from which identity and a capacity to judge and act in the world are derived.⁵⁹

Here I think of Paul's series, *Frugal Pleasures*, where objects on a table is the privileged site for a politicised commentary on the significance of the simple good in daily life. Pattison believes that human relationships and ethical relationships more generally, benefit from attentive relationships with things, with the understanding that

⁵⁶ While Bennett does not cite Bachelard in her work, James L. Smith makes the connection: "Both see matter as an inherently captivating entity with the power to hold and shape human affect and imagination. Both place natural vitality in a pivotal role in the human perception of and interaction with the world." James L. Smith, "New Bachelards? Reveries, Elements and Twenty-First Century Materialism," in *Bachelard e la plasticità della materia*, special issue of *Altre Modernità / Other Modernities* (Oct 2012): 163. Smith's project involves drawing Bachelard into conversation with the "ecologically inflected material philosophy borne from our current environmental crises and anxieties" in particular, that of Jane Bennett and David Macauley. Smith's focus is a "remediated Bachelardian framework." Ibid., 156, 157. He writes: "The 'language' of matter has grown, the 'adjectives' have multiplied: material imagery is now far greater in scope than it was in a traditionally Bachelardian sense, and the perception of this image is tied in with an endless Deleuzian web of correspondences. ... [Bachelard] is by no means a politically motivated philosopher, and Bennett is not primarily preoccupied with the mechanics of subjectivity, yet each imply...the possibility and even desirability a theory of material imagination that both illuminates the human trans-subjective imagination, politicises the implications of these imaginings, and enables a reverie that goes deeper and works on a greater spectrum than before." Ibid., 162-163.

⁵⁷ Harris, "Light on Things," n.p.

⁵⁸ Stephen Pattison, "Living relations with visual and material artifacts," in *Religion, Media and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Gordon Lynch and Jolyon Mitchell, Anna Strhan (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 198.

⁵⁹ Pattison, "Living relations with visual and material artifacts," 201.

we inhabit and share the same world as things: “It would almost certainly increase our pleasure and wonder in the material world, encouraging us to take it more seriously, to become more attached to it, and perhaps also to value individual artifacts more profoundly.”⁶⁰ Pattison concludes with a reference to Bachelard’s ethos to make his point, emphasising the idea of friendly objects: “whenever we live close to familiar, everyday things, we begin once again to live slowly, thanks to their fellowship”⁶¹ One of Bachelard’s phrases communicates something of the ethos of wonder that Bennett endorses, which happens to include the notion of whiteness as a transcendental horizon in everyday life that Paul depicts:

If we give objects the friendship they should have, we do not open a wardrobe without a slight start. Beneath its russet wood, a wardrobe is a very white almond. To open it, is to experience an event of whiteness.⁶²

Bachelard describes the poet’s task as transformative. The poet assists us in finding “joy in looking,”⁶³ Bachelard writes. “[Sometimes], in the presence of a perfectly familiar object, we experience an extension of our intimate space,” he continues.⁶⁴ Through extending the gesture of friendship with ‘things,’ a kind of transference of life occurs. Bachelard approaches the nature of ‘thingness’ or particularity that could be said to have an aura of the spiritual within the phenomenological relationship – a sense that Paul would have affirmed. He writes: “Objects that are cherished in this way really are born of an intimate light, and they attain to a higher degree of reality than indifferent objects, or those that are defined by geometric reality.”⁶⁵ The relation of intimacy that Paul explored through her work *Unpacking the Body*, literally frames everyday objects in a way that goes beyond a sense of wonder, to a way of working through her personal relationship with her daughter Imogen.

⁶⁰ Pattison, “Living relations with visual and material artifacts,” 202. Pattison also cites Bennett’s version of enchantment. Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 171, in Pattison, “Living relations with visual and material artifacts,” 202.

⁶¹ M. McAllester Jones, *Gaston Bachelard Subversive Humanist* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 157, in *Ibid.*, 202.

⁶² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 81.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* “To give an object poetic space is to give it more space than it has objectivity; or, better still, it is following the expansion of its intimate space.” *Ibid.*, 202.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

Paul's spiritual sensibility is oblique when read alongside Bachelard. But in some instances, intimations of a spiritual orientation enter Bachelard's *The poetics of space*. To select an appropriate example, Bachelard cites Henri Bosco, on the mystical joys of housekeeping: "This was creation of an object, a real act of faith, taking place before my enchanted eyes."⁶⁶ In a poem entitled "House Rules," (date unknown) Paul again employs the rose as a symbolic motif that puts religion and the everyday on the same page. Silver spoons and a misplaced lemon squeezer provide the setting, as the presence of her mother within the poem replaces granny bonnets for roses. The mundane-divine connection is made explicit in the final stanza that reads: "Religion is not much to do with faith, I think / & everything to do with housekeeping."⁶⁷ Paul's religious disposition here meets her association with feminism which finds its grounding in a connection with the everyday.

Paul's insistence on interconnection with the world, was for her an active attention, exhibited through the activity of her practice. Locating a convergence between a postmodern spiritual eco-feminist perspective, and the ethos of new materialisms, supports a contextualisation of Paul's sensibility. I read into Paul's practice, drawing from the margins of her views towards a consideration of her practice within a broader landscape, "just outside / the picture."⁶⁸ Paul's allusively defined sacramental approach, through which she positions herself within a Catholic mystical tradition aligns with the kind of thinking that emerged from the deep ecology movement, or postmodern spirituality, and places her work at the forefront of contemporary practices informed by the theoretical sensibilities that Gablik represents. I place Bennett's minor encounters as facilitators of wonder in everyday life, alongside Bachelard's poetics of intimate space and the notion of 'person-like' relations with ordinary everyday objects.⁶⁹ In Paul's

⁶⁶ Henri Bosco, *Le jardin d'Hyacinthe*, 192, in Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 68. The Bosco text: "...little moments of joy mounted from the depths of her heart, enlivening her household tasks. She did not wait to finish these tasks before withdrawing into herself, where she could contemplate her heart's content the supernatural images that dwelt there. Indeed, figures from this land appeared to her familiarly, however commonplace the work she was doing, and without in the least seeming to dream, she washed, dusted and swept in the company of angels." Henri Bosco, *Le jardin d'Hyacinthe*, 173, in *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁷ From the poem "House Rules" in *Like Love Poems*, 114. From "Right relation series."

⁶⁸ From "O" in *Like love poems*, 92.

⁶⁹ A distinction must be made between these conceptions of enchantment and their ensuing relational ontologies. Bennett's "vitality of matter" is grounded in the immanence of scientific thought where non-

practice these voices converge to recontextualise the Romantic notion of enchantment for an ethics of relation with material reality. Within this broader context, Paul exhibits a way of working that has contemporary socio-ecological relevance.

The phenomenology of white space

In Paul's reflections on her art practice, she was specific about drawing on a sense of the sacred through colour, which included white. Colour contained symbolic significance for Paul, but it was also an affect-driven correlation. In her use of white, one could read a formal kind of apophatic sense of the spiritual, but at the same time, it is often whiteness that she turns to for emotional refuge – for her it had presence:

“Without the pressure of mortality or love, perhaps...the whiteness can become simply inert space.”⁷⁰ In this sense, Paul presents a phenomenology of whiteness.

The birth of Paul's first child in 1973 saw the introduction of whiteness to her work, as a reference to transcendence, and as a compositional device as she turned to place emphasis on the *spaces* in between things as the *subject* of her works.⁷¹ Her poem, “AFTER CHILDBIRTH,” marks this development: “I / desired to pass...through a / white / square / to / air / to / O.”⁷² This reference defines white space as an emotional space and a desire for simplicity.

In Paul's poetry, sometimes the white of the blank page is utilised in specific ways, as in the poem “blessings on Morandi,” for example. But in a good majority of her poems, it is the conceptual reference to white itself. Paul's poem, “A sick girl,” is another such example. Recalling the visual impact of her film *Roses* and again this idea of the friendliness of objects, it reads:

sentient things are placed on the same plane as the human. In order to position her work against the “spiritualisation” of nature, or foundationalist assumptions, she draws upon Stephen K. White's notion of weak ontology. Bennett's contemporary sites of enchantment are not demonstrable sites of “truth in any strong sense,” – they are “speculative and contestable.” Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 161. Gablik on the other hand tends towards the spiritualisation of matter. These thinkers are situated within different theoretical and historical contexts – social and political dimensions are less than understated in Bachelard – but there are cross currents of shared sympathies related to material imagination: the connection between memory and imagination, meaning and matter, or put simply, the way in which the material world is valued.

⁷⁰ Paul in O'Brien, “Beyond Sensation,” 69-71.

⁷¹ Paul “The use of still life,” 1992. MS-Papers-9473-115, Paul, Joanna, 1945-2003: Papers. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. 24 January 2017.

⁷² From “After Childbirth,” cited in “*from Rooms and Episodes: 2 - Written at St Omer*,” 49.

the peonies shatter the shade with their red bodies
their hotness splinters my eyes
til the white curtain returns its kind whiteness

In Paul's later drawing and painting work, her compositions often contained an excess of white space. For her, white had become a "lens of religious intuition."⁷³ I now consider this use of space, as a way of mediating a sense of the divine through an affect-driven sensory experience: a phenomenology of white space. I also consider the connections between the motif of the white rose, the cipher O, and her use of whiteness as a way of reading a notion of divine presence as conceptualised through a phenomenology of being. I call upon the assistance of Karl Rahner via Richard Viladesau, and again, Bachelard's poetics of material imagination.

Sensory experience and transcendence in horizons of white

Paul's works can be considered as phenomenological horizons for the experience of religious transcendence. This reading is applicable to the viewer's experience but is especially relevant within Paul's phenomenological experience of the world. Viladesau, drawing on Karl Rahner's transcendental anthropology, considers the viewer's encounter with a transcendental horizon within sensory experience. This experience is earthed in "a priori disposition" of the individual, "who asks after the question of being, and who thereby experiences him or herself as a being with an unlimited horizon, open to the mystery of God."⁷⁴ An encounter with art has the capacity to heighten general sensory experience through its "implicit reference to the more ultimate horizon..."⁷⁵ Sensory experience of this kind is revelatory in that it can "[make] people aware of their original religious experience' – or...of the 'depth' dimension of experience in general."⁷⁶ Art in this case is employed as an enhancement, in support of a theology of revelation. As Viladesau states, "...art can be used to bring to light the sensory horizon

⁷³ Paul in Paul and Eagle, "Letters from Room to Room," 93.

⁷⁴ "Glossary: Transcendental" in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xv.

⁷⁵ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 160.

⁷⁶ Rahner, "Art against the Horizon of Theology and Piety," 163 in *Ibid.*, 158.

and through it the transcendental horizon of the perceiving mind, the absolute.”⁷⁷ In this way, the experience of the ‘religious’ through the senses positions this kind of art as a form of mediation; it must function by analogy.

Rahner’s *Vorgriff* (the pre-apprehension of being) is a suitable concept for a reading of Paul’s work, where the objects of everyday life are set against a (white) “background, of an infinite, unlimited horizon.”⁷⁸ Rahner’s theological aesthetics offers a way of considering the excess or ‘something more’ that Paul maintained with her phenomenological approach to practice. The mystery of the divine is here, however, comprehended through the implicit capacity of the human subject in general, where sensory experience includes the possibility of a comprehension of the divine.

As the viewer approaches Paul’s work – this might be a white table top domestic scene or pencil marks of watery reflections on an expanse of still white – they often encounter a sensory experience of whiteness. Here I think of Paul’s comments on how her mark-making became a way of activating the white paper, or the way she considered the page to be a symbol for the ‘self.’ So, it follows that the white ground could be read as a cipher for the ‘pre-apprehension of being’ or an awareness of self, as it functions as the background of an implicit and a priori knowledge of being.

As an example, Viladesau cites some Chinese landscape artists⁷⁹ for whom space is an essential element in reference to the “absorption of the soul in nature, which in turn is the symbol of the immeasurable and eternal, the great Void.”⁸⁰ Here, a still life or domestic object painting compositionally set within an empty background, “emphasizes the sheer facticity and contingency of their (and the viewer’s) being.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 160.

⁷⁸ “Glossary: *Vorgriff* (Pre-apprehension of Being)”: “A capacity of the dynamic self-movement of the spirit, whereby a particular object of knowledge in each act of cognition is grasped in its limitation and against a background of an infinite, unlimited horizon.” Glossary, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, xv.

⁷⁹ Viladesau cites examples from the Southern Sung and Yuan dynasties: *Mountain in Mist* by Ying Yü-chien; *Boat at Twilight* and *The Downpour* by Hsia Kuei; *Landscape with Willows* by Ma Yüan. Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 160.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ As examples Viladesau cites Mu Ch’i’s *Persimmons* and *Wild Goose*, *Fisherman on lake in Winter*, by Ma Yüan, and *Bamboo in the Wind* by Wu Chien. *Ibid.*

Such art, we might suggest, evokes the coincidence of the “immanence” and “transcendence” of the divine. It “represents” these precisely by the absence of any representation except that of things themselves, in their concrete particularity. Nor are these presented as the “symbol” of something “else”: rather, their “suchness” (*Sosein*)⁸² is itself what participates in the eternal and reveals it in both them and the viewer.⁸³

Paul’s reference to white as a “ground of multiplicity” or “lens of religious intuition,”⁸⁴ while maintaining the compositional space of the work, follows this idea of space that delineates particularity. For example, the compositional similarity of her work with Chan Buddhist painter Mu Ch’i or Muqu Fachang’s (13th Century) *Six Persimmons* (ref. 63), allows for a similar reading. In this work the empty space of the background emphasises the particularity of the objects, and thus the being of the thing in question. Paul references the influence of Chinese calligraphy on her sensibility.⁸⁵ White space reads as an “enveloping space”⁸⁶ or in Paul’s words, an “enveloping atmosphere,”⁸⁷ but in her writing she more frequently referred to the likes of Gerard Manley Hopkins, than to the notion of the Great Void.

Paul’s phenomenology of space involved encounters she had with everyday life, grounded in a present relationality between her inner world and sensory experience. Rahner represents an oblique reference to the way in which Paul’s work can be understood to contain the capacity of a spiritual reading in a referential sense – where aesthetic experience correlates with religious experience. He provides an

⁸² Duns Scotus’s *haecceitas* comes to mind, and Viladesau relays this relationship. Viladesau also mentions the Mahāyana Buddhist notion *tathātā* (suchness) “as the positive aspect of the Void (*śūnya*).” *Ibid.*, n. 70, 161-162.

⁸³ Viladesau then goes on to say that of course this depends on the disposition of the viewer – in that they maintain an openness towards the transcendent horizon. He also notes that: “As Augustinus Wucherer-Huldenfeld remarks, such works of art—including abstractions—can serve as a “thickening” or “condensation” of being (*Verdichtung des Daseins*) and can, like all beings, bring to appearance the eternal “more” (*Je-Mehr*) of their depth, the ground of being itself. Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld, “Sein und Wesen des Schönen,” *Theologie und Ästhetik*, ed. Günter Pöltner and Helmuth Vetter (Wien, Freiburg, Basel: Herder, 1985), 20-34, 21 in *Ibid.*, 161-162.

⁸⁴ Paul in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 93.

⁸⁵ Paul, “New Forms in Christian Art,” n.p.

⁸⁶ Osvald Siren, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting*, (New York: Schocken, 1971) 95, 97, cited in McEvelley, “Seeking the Primal Through Paint,” 75-76.

⁸⁷ Paul, “New Forms in Christian Art,” n.p.

anthropological framework, earthed in everyday life, that considers an implicit connection between human perception and divine revelation.

The notion of *kenosis* also dovetails with this interpretation. Paul's use of white also reflects a form of self-emptying which I consider within a contemplative paradigm. Rahner also helps us read this notion as inherently relational, which Ingvild Røsok argues, is "an act of giving and receiving."⁸⁸ For Røsok, the question of a human *kenosis* might reflect "an ultimate way for our relating to God and as such models the Christian way of living."⁸⁹ For Rahner, as Røsok puts it, the transcendental horizon is invitational rather than excluding, and it is within the human constitution and capacity of "inner openness" to reach for it.⁹⁰ *Kenosis* can be read as an activity and gift of the divine, as self-communication, as well as the human response to this gift.⁹¹ Through the acceptance of divine love, the human is in turn equipped to "[surrender] to the other in unconditional love": *kenosis* "is a love to be received and to be emptied forth."⁹² Paul writes of a "Christian attitude" that "[penetrates]" her work.⁹³ This reading of *kenosis*, as a relational paradigm rather than a doctrinal position, supports a way of understanding a fundamental "loving or...celebratory attitude" rather than a "belief system," in Paul's work.⁹⁴

White roundness: a poetic immediacy

Paul's phenomenology of white also supports the immediacy of the poetic experience. Bachelard's musings on roundness as a phenomenology of being represents another perspective from which to consider Paul's work. In addition to the white page itself, it could also be argued that her use of the cypher O is a direct reference to the notion of being. In an exhibition *Light on Things*, at the Brett McDowell Gallery in 2016, a work entitled *on roundness* (1984, ref. 64, fig. 22) could well be a reference to Bachelard's concluding chapter on "the phenomenology of roundness," in his *Poetics of Space*. Here

⁸⁸ Ingvild Røsok, "The Kenosis of Christ Revisited: The Relational Perspective of Karl Rahner" in *The Heythrop Journal* vol. 58, no. 1 (January 2017): 51.

⁸⁹ Røsok, "The Kenosis of Christ Revisited," 52.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹³ Paul, "New Forms in Christian Art," n.p.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

he approaches a kind of fundamental principle of life. As Joë Bousquet exclaims: “He had been told that life was beautiful. No! Life is round.”⁹⁵ Bachelard discovers roundness is an image of being that is *not* defined by his poets and thinkers as metaphorical. Paul’s translation of this idea is a painting of a white table top scene with collage: pencil lines intimating circular objects, a glass of water, an orange red piece of fruit, and a curved line of deep green. In this work, the motif of those things that are round are the furnishings of a life. The roundness of being is intimated and rendered by Paul, upon what is largely a white page. This work could be read as a prelude to an understanding of the roundness of life. It exhibits interiority itself, and if read alongside Bachelard, corroborates the notion of being. This idea could be translated more clearly, through Paul’s poem “AFTER CHILDBIRTH,” which concludes with a reference to a state of being as “O”.

In contrast to Rahner’s inclination towards a Thomist notion of mediation, Bachelard discards the notion of intermediaries within his poetics of the imagination: “In fact, it is not a question of observing, but of experiencing being in its immediacy....I repeat, images of *full roundness* help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately, inside.”⁹⁶ Bachelard presents roundness as an image of being, understood through “the purest sort of phenomenological meditation,”⁹⁷ where the poetic image is absorbed upon immediate encounter.⁹⁸ The holism of roundness illustrates this immediacy – roundness *is* being – rather than functioning in the form of an image, metaphor or illustration. Bachelard’s ‘roundness of being,’ as a way of expressing a phenomenology of being in the purest way he can think of, might carry different connotations when it comes to the anthropological conception of what constitutes the spiritual subject, or subjective comprehension of ‘being,’ but it functions in a similar manner as a form of mediating an understanding of the phenomenological encounter. The image of a horizon line is here transposed as a transcendental horizon of roundness. An individual cannot comprehend

⁹⁵ Joë Bousquet, *Le meneur de lune*, 174 in Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 232.

⁹⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 234.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁹⁸ As Bachelard puts it: “the image must first be taken at its inception.” *Ibid.*, 233.

the curvature of the earth, or shape of the world, in entirety, but against this horizon of roundness one might grasp a sense of their own being in particularity.

Paul works again with this image of roundness in her poem “O.” In this work, the arc of the sea, the earth, apple, or a relational arc between persons, shift expressions of roundness between the micro and the macro. She also refers to the white absence at the centre of a circle as an identifying quality, which mirrors the motif of the earth in the same poem.

Egg/ oval/ & not a/ printers O/ we only know/ the circle/ by its/ absence/
whiteness/ perfection/ ditto/ ontology by/ zero/ the oval/ earth / shaped by/
forces/ preponderant.

Here roundness is linked with whiteness in a movement from the intimate to the immense. In another instance, Paul juxtaposes the cosmic with cosmic intimate space (in the sense that the house is “our corner of the world.)”⁹⁹ The contents of a wardrobe and the spheres of an Aristotelian cosmology meet in one of Paul’s late works in a series entitled, *Dante’s Rose and the Sublunary Wardrobe* (2002, ref. 65 fig. 23). Colourful intimate spaces of the home appear alongside whiteness in a significant series of chalk pastel tondos: a wardrobe full of layered vibrant clothing, a pale window frame, the white rose, and the orbs of heaven. In addition to Paul’s personal reflections on the religious sensibilities in her work, it is her love of literature which supports the religious content of this series. The inner space of a wardrobe as the portrait of a life, swells with meaning against a horizon of transcendence in association with Dante’s cosmic poem. In the *Paradiso*, Dante’s rose is located in the Empyrean – the place beyond the material universe and where God resides. There we find a white rose, visited by golden bees, and the hue of transcendent whiteness.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁰ An excerpt of Dante’s work reads as follows: “Thus marshalled in the form of a white Rose, / The saintly armament was shown to me, / ... / Like trooping bees that from the hive now rove / ... / Into that vast and brilliant flower descend / ... / With Living lustre all their faces glowed, / Of gold their wings, and such their hue beside, / The driven snow such whiteness never showed.” Dante Alighieri, “III Paradiso or The Vision of Paradise,” in *The Trilogy or Dante’s Three Visions*, trans. by John Wesley Thomas (London: Robert Culley), 236.

In Paul's work, the sublunary sphere is a window frame and the contents of a wardrobe. Set against heaven, these domestic spaces contain an aura of the extraordinary in their intimacy – the portrait of an individual life in the colour of clothing. I read the work as commemorative: snapshot tondos present the intimate details of a life remembered after death; they are representations of memory and lived experience in intimate detail. A selection of images from this series were reproduced on the back of Paul's funeral notes, and the year previous, she had sent a paper frieze to her sister Charlotte with 'in memoriam Kevin Cunningham' (Paul's brother-in-law) inscribed on the reverse.

Dreaming whiteness and domestic space

To return to the notion of the house as a store for the poetics of the intimate life, Bachelard lists the wardrobe as a "veritable [organ] of the secret psychological life."¹⁰¹ He writes: "Does there exist a single dreamer of words who does not respond to the word wardrobe?" And continues, "Every poet of furniture...knows that the inner space of an old wardrobe is deep. A wardrobe's inner space is also *intimate space*, space that is not open to just anybody."¹⁰² The wardrobe of *Dante's Rose and the Sublunary Wardrobe*, is open. We see the contents of colour, if not the garments themselves. Bachelard's wardrobe, on the other hand, is closed, and through the exaggeration of poetry, contains the imagined contents of white linen: "And how white the old tablecloth was, white as the moon on the wintry meadow!"¹⁰³ As a wardrobe houses the intimacy of a life, it itself inspires warmth, and "[to] open it, is to experience an event of whiteness."¹⁰⁴ This sense of intimacy is affirmed by Paul, but it is the rose of Dante's *Paradiso*, where whiteness is whiter than snow, and the work takes on a more directly transcendental sense.

Whiteness is also connected to the notion of dreaming which for Bachelard begins in the stillness of abiding within intimate space. This is also the poet's "inner room,"¹⁰⁵ – a topography of the soul: "(The cell of myself fills with wonder / The white-washed wall

¹⁰¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 78.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 81.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 229.

of my secret).”¹⁰⁶ Bachelard writes of “the whiteness of the walls, alone, [protecting] the dreamer’s *cell*”¹⁰⁷ the place of dreams – and for Paul, whiteness is both a refuge and “ground” for poetry.

Paul’s phenomenology of white, as a notion of transcendence, is addressed here within the context of domestic space. For Paul whiteness is both symbolic and literal: “The white vase is a vase as well as a sort of whiteness in the centre.”¹⁰⁸ White space can be considered as a framing device that serves to accentuate the particularity of the subject. In Paul’s work it also offers a way of reading a phenomenology of being. White empty space translates as a reference to the notion of transcendence, (it reads as a literal horizon of vision), and from the perspective and disposition of the individual maker or viewer presents the possibility of religious experience. In addition, the idea of whiteness as space for emotional refuge (and a space for the eyes or senses to rest), affirms a form of immanence where seeing and feeling meet in relation.

Paul’s refusal to directly name things that are sacred through her work, abides within the ethos of the apophatic tradition. But if Paul works with negative space, it is at a remove from the tradition of apophatic aesthetics that can be read within black monochrome painting. The light and whiteness of her work expressed, in her words, “an enveloping atmosphere...a sort of encompassing love,” which she contrasts with “the religious light of tomorrow” that she reads in Colin McCahon’s dichotomy of light and darkness.¹⁰⁹ It differs also from Hotere’s light in darkness. But like Hotere, these spaces in her work are acts of unsaying or unknowing, delineated by desire, which is the language of mystical theology.

For Paul, white space is activated through love. As a kenotic expression, the white space in her work reads as a form of self-emptying that is relationally defined by love. The reference to times in her life, as ‘scouring times’ draws upon the notion of the dark night of the soul – of seeking the divine in difficult times; and of self-relinquishing. But rather than paint or write through darkness, she places herself, and her viewers, within

¹⁰⁶ Pierre-Jean Jouve, *Les Noces*, 50, in *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁰⁸ Paul, “New Forms in Christian Art,” n.p.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

the desired warmth of light. A relational aesthetics delineates her sense of the apophatic. Here a form of relational apophaticism emerges as perhaps the best way of describing her delineation of this tradition within modern art.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusions: the theopoetics of a painter/poet of the everyday

Summary of findings: Paul's spiritual sensibility and poetics

Reviewing Paul's spiritual sensibility first required the delineation of her practice as a painter/poet of the everyday. She worked in response to a modernist heritage. Her contribution to the arts found expression through a multi-disciplinary practice, where she worked at the forefront of experimental filmmaking, established herself as a painter, and developed an accomplished hand at poetry. The ethos of her practice emphasised the connectedness of everyday life to artistic practice. This came out of a natural disposition of a felt connectedness she maintained with the world around her, where her art helped mediate her place in the world. Her commitment to exploring female subjectivity through her work, found a political voice, if understated and in contrast to the more explicit protest works of feminist art. Her association with the women's art movement was also a catalyst for the development of other women's artistic practices.

Yet Paul positioned herself on the borders of her fields of interest or involvement.

Upon writing about her religious sensibility in relation to her artistic practice she titled her contribution, "On Not Being a Catholic Writer." She enfolded a reformed sensibility into her Catholic outlook. She expressed a form of theological phenomenology that found sustenance in a selection of poets and mystical thinkers in Christianity, and was outworked in a visual and literary style in a balanced aesthetic of richness and restraint.

Paul's use of white space supported the communication of her spiritual sensibility. As a formal compositional device, or visual poetry, the white in her work maintains her theological phenomenology, as a "lens of religious intuition,"¹ and space of rest. Here a connection between her inner world and her way of negotiating her external world was distilled. Moreover, as a space of rest her use of white sometimes delineated a kind of space that implicitly invites relation with the divine. Her use of white space is apophatic in the sense that it is space left open; it waits for the viewer; and the viewer waits on 'G-d.' It is a space of potentiality, not in the sense that it already contains all the

¹ Paul in Paul and Eagle, "Letters from Room to Room," 93.

constituents of a reality, like the colour black, but maintains the “pressure of...love”² through absence that makes way for presence. For Paul, white space was a visual and poetic point of connection between faith and life. As the signature of her poetic restraint, it supported what she called her “sacramental theology.”

Turning to things in nature, her practice worked through a theological phenomenology that affirmed a sacramental sense of the divine in nature. It was her immediate connection first to the natural and cultural world, which she defined as a correspondence between her emotional body and her physical body through her art, that defined this position. Perception and consciousness coalesce as her work encapsulated a way of looking and being in the world and she sought to express what she perceived the world to say through her. Paul’s theological phenomenology was earthed in lived experience and was connected to a commitment to ecological integrity. Her reading in philosophy supported her position, as she engaged with the age-old philosophical quagmire of oneness and particularity. She maintained a sacramental perspective on the world that valued the specificity and integrity of the natural world. Here a notion of enchantment emerges within her worldview as her practice was a natural outworking of the wonder she found in nature.

The second part of my study examined Paul’s practice as a relational poetics. Supported by the ethos of cultural feminism, she worked through a poetics of intimate space that recontextualised a notion of enchantment within the domain of everyday life. Following Bachelard’s lead, I argued that the house, for Paul also, becomes a primary example of a site for a poetics of space. In addition, Paul draws on the notion of dreaming, as Bachelard does, towards inhabiting intimate space and exemplifying the role of a painter/poet as a phenomenologist. Following Gablik’s thesis, the definition of an artistic practice defined as relational rather than object based, emerges also as a site for the spiritual in art. In this sense, Paul’s practice joins the trajectory of an eco-orientated post-modern spirituality. The fostering of the notion of enchantment for ethical relations is ushered into the spotlight through Bennett’s political theorising, dismantling the notion of ensouling nature with the divine. ‘Person-like’ relations with everyday objects

² Paul in O’Brien, “Beyond Sensation,” 69-71.

and the poetic process of anthropomorphising, become ways of both artistically and ethically inhabiting the world. Regardless of the religious or spiritual or political dispositions of thinkers like Bachelard and Bennett, Paul's spiritual sensibility coheres with a political positioning that is ethically transformative.

A phenomenology of intimate space and a phenomenology of white space, are connected in the way Paul's whiteness functions as a site for personal refuge, and both analogical transcendence and relational apophaticism. Paul's use of white activates her work, not only in the way it supports her choice of objects, but in the way, it functions as the subject of many of her works. When white is the subject of her work, it is often found in the presence of personal circumstances of loss, love, or in the case of the work *Be Still and Know*, the notion of transcendence in a more direct referential sense.

Reading white space as an analogy for religious transcendence becomes possible, as the analogy of the senses mediate a referential horizon for divine presence within everyday life. As a form of *kenosis*, Paul's use of white space as a self-emptying contemplative practice, can also be understood as engendering an openness to receive the self-giving divine mystery. The notion of *kenosis* is a way of understanding the inherently personal experiences that she worked through her practice.

In the predominantly white work *On Roundness* the emotional space is transposed within a more abstracted metaphysical space. I read Paul's use of the white ground as an analogy for divine transcendence through sensory experience, which in addition, does away with intermediaries to encompass a more direct sense of being in the world: the inhabitation of intimate space. As a painter/poet, she envelops herself in white; it becomes a direct form of visual poetry. Paul's aesthetic of 'feeling and restraint' is exemplified in her works where white is predominant, and a sense of the spiritual is often conflated with the personal. Here an apophatic aesthetics meets the quotidian. She does not work through a notion of apophaticism in the direct and abstracted sense of a monochrome painting, but it is one of the avenues of interpreting her work.

Theopoetic dreaming with Joanna Margaret Paul

Having reviewed the spiritual sensibility of Paul's practice, and considered two primary sites through which this sensibility finds expression, here I turn to consider how her relational poetics and use of white space sustain her more explicitly theological musings. Theological dreaming in the Bachelardian sense might better describe the way theology can engage with Paul's practice.

Paul's religious and spiritual worldview does not lend well to the systematic quest for a single conclusion. But the process of considering her work through different theological and theoretical lenses supports the contextualisation of her work within a relational, or implicitly ethical, paradigm. Paul's position on the borders of traditions delineates a multiplicity of theological implications and contexts. Upon examination of the specifics of her artistic expression or mode of practice, a systematic categorisation or logical outworking of theology makes way for multiplicities. In this sense her work is a form of theopoetics that places emphasis on the poetic expression of divine relationality, or mysticism, that reflects a disposition, rather than adherence to belief statements.

Paul considered the spiritual sensibility of her work as a 'sacramental theology' – where Catholic imagination is tempered by a Reformed aesthetic of restraint – that found expression through the pathos of liturgical style. So, I could approach these considerations first through a brief outline of the dialectic between a Catholic and Reformed theological aesthetics. Within the field of theological aesthetics, the division between Catholic and Protestant perspectives run deep.³ Paul instead highlights that the

³ On the comparison between Catholic and Protestant theological aesthetics, William Dyrness offers a distilled perspective that states Catholic theology is more concerned with ontological conceptions: objects of art have the potential to reveal the being of God, whereas Protestant theological aesthetics is more concerned with the "relation and activity" involved in a "common...*project*," in participation with the divine. In black and white terms, Dyrness believes the difference lies in a Catholic preference for the visibility of God, and a Protestant preference for the hiddenness of God. Protestant theological aesthetics tends to emphasise the separation between God and creation. In distinction from a sacramental perspective, art is viewed "in its materiality as fundamentally metaphoric and illuminating of, rather than transparent to, the divine presence." Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 139. An overview of Protestant pedagogy places "an emphasis on the metaphor of reading and interpretation" and a "typological understanding...of the meaning (and "beauty") of life in the world." Ibid., 149. Dyrness's project is an attempt at reconciliation, with an emphasis on the importance of contemplation within his development of a Protestant theological aesthetics. The focus of his *Poetic Theology* posits a poetics of everyday life, with a reintegration of a notion of contemplation in a participatory and embodied Christian narrative.

affiliation of any artist to a religious tradition does not necessarily equate to a theological orientation of aesthetics suitable for interpretive endeavours. In Paul's work, the tension between Catholic 'feeling' and Protestant 'restraint' presents a formal and stylistic difference, rather than a reference to a strictly theological or ontological difference. But to focus the theological examination of Paul's practice on her phenomenological outworking of relation to the world, requires that I consider her broader worldview within the 'catholic mystical tradition,' as she puts it. Here she provides more direct cues for analysis. Her practice and her understanding of the world is inherently linked, so a form of theological phenomenology based in lived experience is a predominant consideration. This connection, within her broader interests, provides room to consider a theological aesthetics that acknowledges the sacramental principle within a relationally defined art practice. A relationally defined apophaticism is also apparent within this nexus.

Feminist aesthetics finds its basis within lived experience and Paul earthed her practice within her lived experience. Paul's reflections on the relation of her spiritual sensibility to her practice as a painter/poet also support the significance of lived experience. Her admission to working within the bounds of Cixous's *écriture féminine*, however 'dissident' or 'lower case' she made of her feminist stance, positions her work within the borders of a cultural feminist aesthetic. Her statements on "the great meaning in ordinary things" and of not "[wishing] to separate...significant and everyday actions"⁴ also carry an implicit sense of a spiritual worldview that resists dualism and deconstructs the notion of the artist as genius. Here an everyday aesthetics and religious intuition find expression within her practice, which could arguably be defined as a form of theopoetics.

For Catherine Keller, theopoetics is a "creative practice" in support of a "theology-as-method," with a grounds for "a multiplicity of oscillations"⁵ in its outworking. In relation to this definition, yet in contrast to theopoetics as a method for theology as outlined at the beginning of this study, I argue that Paul evokes the ethos of a theopoetic

⁴ Paul, "Women as Artists," from *An exhibition of six women artists*, 12-13, cited in *Spiral 1* (1976): 41.

⁵ Keller, "Appendix of Definitions," in Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water*, 205.

in her art: first, through her use of a symbolic language and her sacramental vision that is exploratory, invitational and yet grounded in the material things she engaged with; second, through the expressions of her faith and spiritual sensibility in language that draws from poetry, literature and theological tradition in connection with her practice; third, through a notion of wonder at the world; fourth, through an interpretive association of her work alongside eco-feminist relational theology and the premise of lived experience affirmed by the women's art movement. Paul's relational poetics and use of white space coalesce in theopoetic reverie.

A sacramental principle beyond the sacred and the secular

The sacramental principle as a feature of Paul's art practice, emerges as her primary theological orientation towards material reality. Paul's resistance to the direct depiction a sacred thing in nature reveals of her understanding of the sacred in the world within a sacramental purview. Mediation devices were necessary for her, and reveal her respect for the sacred in nature, and thus for nature itself. Overall, she indicated a more integrated understanding of the divine in the world, privileging an immanent transcendence.⁶

A sacramental principle sits behind some of the more specific theological renderings of thinking through the relation of the divine in the world, that finds union between sense perception as spiritual perception. Sacramentality can be traced from first millennium understandings that affirmed a symbolic mediation between any given piece of material reality and the presence of the divine, through to more recent postmodern iterations of spirituality within an eco-oriented and scientific frame of reference.⁷ The sacramental principle also supports the notion of reenchancement. From a broader perspective it assists with understanding the ways artists have approached material reality seeking the divine.

⁶ Within Frank Burch Brown's categories of aesthetic mediation of transcendence, Paul's sacramental orientation tents towards an immanent transcendence. Burch Brown's categories read as follows: Negative transcendence, (the void – paradox and catachresis); radical transcendence (radical yet communicative – the incarnation, nature, the metaphysical poets for example (Calvinist); proximate transcendence, (sacramentalism, analogy); and immanent transcendence, (the limit of the sacramental: not quite pantheism, but might include panentheism). Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 117.

⁷ David Brown, "Sacramentality" in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, ed. Nicholas Adams, George Pattison and Graham Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 615.

Disagreements over the configuration of relations within the sacramental principle reflect the varied understandings of the term within the wider theological tradition. Definitions of sacramentality shift between the rejection of a past narrow understanding of the term sacramental, and the theological tensions and negotiations that ensued over the definition of the term outside the Church.⁸ David Brown cites Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and Louis-Marie Chauvet (b.1942) as alternate examples of contention. From his perspective, Teilhard de Chardin made a connection between science and sacramentality: “All matter is seen as sacramentally charged, with the Eucharistic consecration contributing, however attenuatedly, to the ‘Christification’ of the whole universe.”⁹ In contrast, Brown believes Louis-Marie Chauvet’s *Symbol and Sacrament* (1987) better represents the current position of the Catholic Church, where the “sacraments are...presented as necessary entry points for properly appreciating the much wider symbolic system that is found to exist.”¹⁰ The tension between a broader sacramental view that sees material reality as sacramentally infused and a more theologically regulated version that names specific liturgical elements as divinely given sacraments, reflects the broader understanding of these tensions.¹¹ Susan White writes of a shift in the understanding of “the sacramentality of things” from an older form of perceiving a sacred/secular division where the divine imposed upon the profane (“...that somehow grace flows through an ecclesiastical plumbing system and emerges out of the sacramental taps...”) to a vision of sacramentality, (naming Rahner, and Lonergan for this shift in understanding), “as part of the ongoing, mutual encounter between free,

⁸ Brown, “Sacramentality,” 628.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Brown writes: “Chauvet suggests that we think instead in more personal and social terms of the symbolic language of the Church mediating God’s new world and the values that go along with it. Sacraments should therefore not be offered to nominal Catholics but only to those who take seriously not only the call to participate in a new way of viewing reality but also its ethical implications for transformative behaviour.” Ibid.

¹¹ According to Hart, Brown moves “in the direction of an account of the Word’s incarnational presence itself grounded in terms of a notion of ‘sacrament’ rather than *vice versa*.” Ibid., 88. On this point, Hart refers to: Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience Through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 52. Hart’s inclination: “...while analogies between incarnational and sacramental presence are certainly appropriate and helpful, they can also be misleading. The modes of divine presence alluded to in each case remain quite distinct, and the relevant order of priority is significant.” Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 88. For Hart, locations of revelation are within “...acts of gracious accommodation in which God enters the material ‘order of signs’ within which our distinctly human creaturely existence and response are played out.” Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*, 75.

transcendent persons (divine and human) in which the physical, the material, becomes a mode of self-disclosure for both.”¹²

Paul grounded her sacramental vision within the domain of everyday life. Her practice exhibits a notion of sacramentality that overcomes a division between the so called secular and sacred divide. Brown argues that the generosity of God could not help but support a sacramental principle that would function outside the liturgical context of the Church.¹³ This view affirms an anthropological and philosophical understanding, in Brown’s words, “of humanity as essentially a *homo symbolicus*, as a being who necessarily operates with symbols.”¹⁴ Paul was aware of the collective and “eclectic” nature of symbolisation.¹⁵ She was aware of genealogies of the spiritual art history, in particular, “the symbolism of light,” which she saw in the work of Bonnard, Cézanne and Turner, as expressing [sic] “in one way or another: light is God.”¹⁶ For her “they all had a wonderful apprehension of light and its meaning in poetry.”¹⁷ In her own work she sought to express a “visual poetry” through “the way light explicates the world.”¹⁸ Through “looking at the world” and “[discerning] a certain poetry in things” a “symbolic language evolves,” she states.¹⁹ In her words, she did not “feel as though [she had] a set of symbols which” she worked with.²⁰ Moreover, her symbolic language, which often included the referential the use of language, was instead “[exploratory and evolving]” while also maintaining an indexical link with her objects of study: “The white vase is a vase as well as a sort of whiteness in the centre.”²¹ Paul’s ‘visual poetry’ is theopoetic in this sense.

¹² Susan White, “Theology of Sacred Space,” in *The Sense of the Sacrament: Movement and Measure in Art and Music, Place and Time*, ed. David Brown and Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1995), 39-40.

¹³ Brown writes: “If God is truly generous, would we not expect to find him at work everywhere and in such a way that all human beings could not only respond to him, however implicitly, but also develop insights from which even Christians could learn?” David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

¹⁴ Brown, “Sacramentality,” 629-630.

¹⁵ Paul, “New Forms in Christian Art,” n.p.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Paul in Paul and Eagle, “Letters from Room to Room,” 92.

¹⁹ Paul, “New Forms in Christian Art,” n.p.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

Paul was not explicit about where she stood on the sacramental spectrum. She wrote of “the beauty of the sacraments – spirit and thing together, the necessity of art” as being what attracted her to the Catholic faith.²² In another instance she drew upon Teilhard de Chardin in support of a vision of nature fostered by a sense of the sacred, in love and accountability.²³ From a broader perspective the sacramental principle can be read between the lines of her practice, and through the intertextual cues she gives in the poets and thinkers to which she was drawn. While she did not work with explicitly sacramental or liturgical symbolism, she was aware of the symbolic potential of her subject matter. She expressed the “desire to find an equivalent to certain mystical or spiritual apprehension of the world.”²⁴

Within her sacramental framework, Paul also drew on the notion of wonder through her appreciation of the specificity of things. Paul’s affinity with Gerard Manley Hopkins, and her subsequent inclusion of Duns Scotus in her eco-orientated theological arguments against GE, represents a more explicit sacramental framework for her practice.

Paul’s comments on Hopkins’s poem “As kingfishers catch fire...,” as “a profound statement of the specificity of thing...: the I AM in all things...”²⁵ and her reflections on Hopkins’s observations in his journal entries, reveal an understanding of the importance of the particularity of things. She cites the concept *haecceity* or *thisness*, framing these concepts in reference to love over reason, writing: “love recognizes while reason classifies. Love recognises the particular – *this* face; *this* rose.”²⁶ Paul also read in Scotus a conception of the relation between the soul and body that transcended dualism.²⁷ She was against a simplistically objective view of the world, hence the emphasis on love over reason. On the whole, her reflections on several concepts attributed to Duns Scotus were brief, and all used in defence of a generalised celebration

²² Paul, “On Not Being a Catholic Writer,” 135.

²³ See Paul, “Boundaries: an essay on genetic engineering,” n.p.

²⁴ Paul, “New Forms in Christian Art,” n.p.

²⁵ Paul, “Cherished Nature,” n.p.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p.

and affirmation of the integrity of nature against her perception of the meddling evil of GE.

Hopkins was not a theologian, but he developed a kind of theological aesthetics that drew from a specific christocentric view of the beauty of God in nature.²⁸ This was a sacramental vision of material reality: it was a “signic vision” influenced by Ruskin’s “emphasis on (seeing) [or] reality as revelation *in its particularity*...”; it was spiritually inspired by Ignatius (*Spiritual exercises*); and it was philosophically or theologically informed by Scotus.²⁹ The Incarnation was central to the formation of this vision, and Hopkins’s poem “As kingfishers catch fire,” is acknowledged as a quintessential example of this.

Within this schema, poetry was more than a “religious medium” but “an *effective mediation* of the Word, sacramental.”³⁰ Philip A. Ballinger argues that Hopkins approached poetry-as-theology, which arguably echoes a theopoetic sensibility. Poetry is considered sacramental in light of Hopkins’s “inscape,” which, as Ballinger explains, is related to “the experience of Christ’s Incarnation in matter...”³¹ Teilhard de Chardin’s Cosmic Christ assists in understanding Hopkins’s (and Scotus’s) view that things in themselves present Christ.³² They are more than symbols. Poems are “presence-laden,” and for Hopkins, a ground for sacramentality: “Each created thing, in its own special

²⁸ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. 3. Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, ed. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 354.

²⁹ Hopkins interpreted Scotus in conjunction with his own ideas. Ballinger focuses on Hopkins’s interpretation of Scotus, citing material that stated Hopkins was a “flighty reader,” who drew inspiration and confirmation from Scotus. “The true philosophical and developed theological groundings for his incarnationalism were not essentially Jesuit, rather they were, as we shall see, more akin to what is found in the Franciscan traditions of Duns Scotus and even Bonaventure. The Ignatian influence on Hopkins was not primarily theological; rather, it was spiritual and formational in nature.” Philip. A. Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament: The Theological Aesthetic of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2000), 100–101.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Here one could also make a connection between “a cosmic christology...as a Christian panentheistic ecocentrism [and] the holistic-nonanthropocentric ecocentrism of the land ethic.” Richard Clark, *The Cosmic Christ and Panentheistic Ecocentrism: Foundations for a Catholic Land Ethic* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 9. The idea of the Cosmic Christ is also present in some of the other thinkers that Paul was interested in: St John of the Cross and Hildegard von Bingen directly, and Rudolf Steiner and Mathew Fox tangentially.

way, is the total image of its creator.”³³ Here, the Incarnation, following a Scotian epistemology with the emphasis on the individuality of things, or “thisness,” was understood through the particular not the general.³⁴ For Hopkins, an emphasis on a “radical *kenosis* of the ‘eucharistic’ or aeonian Incarnation” justified an “artistic licence” to work with and affirm material reality.³⁵ So here is a theological justification or vocation for the role of the poet. The poet and the world are “‘stressed’ with the life of God, of Christ... ‘stress’ means ‘the making a thing more, or making it markedly, what it already is; it is the bringing out of its nature.’”³⁶

I think of Paul’s drawing *In-carnation* (date unknown, ref. 66, fig. 24) which renders a vase of flowers upon a white table, with a circular mirror in the foreground, and what looks like an ornamental horse on a windowsill in the background. The word “IN - CARNATION” is inscribed at the base of the image. Paul’s play on the notion of the incarnation can here be understood in light of her knowledge of Hopkins’s worldview. The circular form of the mirror adds a further element that references the notion of the incarnation as reflected in the face: “*this* face; *this* rose.”³⁷ In the drawing the mirror is a blank white circle which leads me again to her poem “O”.

The role of the (theo)poet

What Paul called her responsibility as an artist, in her connectedness to the world, can be considered a sacramental vocation, encompassing Hopkins’s role of the poet. She

³³ Joseph Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 315 in Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament*, 146.

³⁴ Ballinger elaborates: “Developing Scotus, Hopkins held that one could come to a revelation of God through apprehending an individual reality’s ‘thisness’. Furthermore, Scotus justified for Hopkins the value and essential importance of sensation in this enterprise. In Scotus, Hopkins discovered that sensation, the moment of ‘naming’ or ‘wording’ a thing as opposed to ‘defining’ a thing, becomes an exalted moment, a moment of revelation.” Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament*, 149.

³⁵ Ibid., 123-124. For Hopkins the Incarnation “was an ‘aeonian’ [everlasting] rather than ‘historical’ event. The first Incarnation was that of the Word into matter (Hopkins’ *ensarkosis* or “word becoming flesh”). The Word ‘seals’ matter in a sacramental sense... Hopkins inferred that this union of ‘flesh and word’ in the *ensarkosis* is a kind of eucharistic Incarnation. The Word, the Christ, incarnates continually in the world of nature and in people as their individuating design or ‘inscape’.” Ibid., 122. See also Maria R. Lichtman, “The Incarnational Aesthetic of Gerard Manley Hopkins,” *Religion and Literature* 23, no. 1 (1991): 40.

³⁶ Hopkins, *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, 2nd ed. ed. Claude Collier Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 141 cited in Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament*, 83.

³⁷ Paul, “Cherished Nature,” n.p.

spoke of a natural disposition to be a “medium” for the “thing” external to herself.³⁸ Following Rilke, Viladesau argues that the role of the poet or artist is about “expressing the existence of things, even the most ordinary, in their variety and uniqueness;” which involves “bringing them to name in human consciousness...”³⁹ Viladesau elaborates upon the poet’s role in uniting the self and the other, through the particularity of the poetic object. Paul’s mention of the presence of love as an activating principle for a reading of her work here follows suit. Viladesau suggests that this relation through particularity is a form of unity that might “signify supernatural love: the drive to share in the divine omnipresence and God’s infinite compassion toward all things—a foretaste of the ‘communion of the saints’ in its cosmic (but earthly, space-and-time-produced) dimension...”⁴⁰ Viladesau draws upon Rilke’s “Ninth” *Duino Elegy* as a textual example. This is the poet’s purpose, he writes, even to say “the reason for existence: to bring the world to consciousness, give it the unity of awareness, extend its material being-there into invisibility, thought, spirit; and so to make the momentary eternal.”⁴¹ This orientation is confirmed in Paul’s work as she refers to Rilke’s Ninth *Duino Elegy*, in her reflection on the religious sensibility of her practice. Paul is referring to a sacred connection with the earth that she sought to maintain in her practice.

A sacramental conception of material reality and human–non-human relations offers an infused and richly possible arena for encounter with the divine that has an implicit affinity with the vocation of the poet. The kind of sacramentality worth perusing in light of Paul’s interests is defined outside of, and in negotiation with, traditional notions of it that assume fixed positions within liturgical theology. Her sacramental vision fits within the broader perspective of a panentheistic worldview. The connection between sacramentality and panentheism has been made by number of theologians seeking to

³⁸ Paul, interview by Barrie, n.p.

³⁹ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 154.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

revitalise and reclaim panentheism for a contemporary context beyond static and controversial definitions of the past.⁴²

The point at which sacramentality and panentheism overlap, within an outlook on the way artists relate to the world, is encompassed in a form of postmodern spirituality (defined in the previous chapter) that emerged contemporaneously to Paul. Arthur Peacocke draws a relation between sacramentality and panentheism through his affirmation of the connection between Luther's presuppositions of "in, with, and under" used to describe the "Real Presence of the Eucharist," with the presence of God in the world.⁴³ Luther's prepositions also define what a sacrament is. As Michael W. Brierley puts it, a sacrament is "a physical thing 'under,' 'in,' or 'through' which God comes. These prepositions are thus intrinsic to sacramentalism (the idea that the cosmos and what is in it are sacraments), as well as to panentheism."⁴⁴ Brierley continues:

Panentheism and sacramentalism refer to different aspects of the same reality, and sacramentalism becomes another defining characteristic of the panentheist position.... The whole cosmos, for panentheism, is sacramental....and the specific sacraments of the church are simply particular intensifications of the general "sacramental principle," sign, symbols, and reminders that any and every thing has the potential to become a full vehicle of the divine.⁴⁵

Paul's 'sacramental theology' delineates the notion of the spiritual in art as a form of immanent transcendence – as a form of panentheism. While not stating it explicitly, this view emerges through her writing on the relation of Catholicism to her practice, and through the myriad of thinkers she drew upon in her defence against GE. Panentheism is also an underlying theological assumption within some of the projects that can be defined under the umbrella of relational theology. Here I conclude with the delineation

⁴² See Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke, *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).

⁴³ Peacocke, "Biology and a Theology of Evolution," 709.

⁴⁴ Michael W. Brierley, "Naming a Quiet Revolution: The Panentheistic Turn in Modern Theology" in *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being*, 8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

of a form of relational theology that best encompasses Paul's interests and calls forth a theopoetic sensibility.

A relational and apophatic (theo)poetry

Poetic process and lived experience are premises for relational theologies which chime with Paul's religious and artistic sensibility. A notion of interconnectedness defined by relational encounter within the 'web of life,' that is collaborative, and process orientated, fits within the lineage of a 'postmodern spirituality,' and defines Paul's sensibility. Paul's position can be delineated on the margins of traditions, and art historical contexts, where a broadly defined sacramental principle governs the relational paradigm of Paul's practice. The point at which her religious faith and spiritual sensibility coalesce in her artistic practice can perhaps best be described as theopoetic. A theopoetic sensibility can be clearly seen within her composition "On Not Being a Catholic Writer." In her poetic reflection she explores the integration of her nondogmatic faith and her artistic practice, drawing from her lived experience, poetic texts, and philosophical tradition.

The fundamental tenet that God is love, puts relationality at the heart of this gathering of voices. A relational theology also finds its basis in the assertion that relationship with God is intuited through lived experience. The conversations that ensue within this domain, resist a systematic enterprise and instead place importance on poetic process, lived experience and the faculties of human imagination and intellect as sites for doing theology. Interdisciplinary engagements and dialogue with fields such as science, feminism, multi-faith dialogue among other endeavours, define contributions to the sensibility. In a general sense, for Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers, relational theology (which includes the theopoetic sensibility) is not systematically inclined: it "is not about fully understanding or adequately imagining anything. It is a poetry that sparks and spins us, through our experiences, imaginations, and cognitive faculties."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers, "Introduction," *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century* (London: SCM Press, 1988), 10. The contributions to this volume are representative of different fields of theology, process theologians like Catherine Keller, feminist theologians, like Daphne Hampson, Mary Condrón, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Carter Heyward are present.

The emphasis on lived experience within the domain of relational theologies provides an easy correlation with Paul's sensibility. A emphasis placed on the interconnectedness and complexity of the world, also relates to current scholarship outside the domain of theology within reenchantment narratives. Bennett's thesis is an example of the broader theoretical implications of the notion of reenchantment. Contemporary theoretical concerns with relational ontologies has garnered the interests of critical discourse in the art world, a testament to the concerns we have with the relational systems that define our world. A scholar like Bennett is 'purely immanent' in philosophical orientation, but she is a potential conversation partner for someone like Catherine Keller, who espouses a relational theology (or process theology) of a panentheistic bent. This discussion broaches the connections between religion, science and art; connections in which Paul expressed an interest.

Paul's approach to the material world engenders a notion of enchantment with ethical implications. Earlier I referred to political theorist Bennett's version of enchantment as a representative of recent eco-orientated political theory. She enters this discussion obliquely; presenting common territory between a broadly defined sacramentality, or postmodern spirituality and current debates within contemporary critical art discourse. As Bennett develops her argument, she expresses a sympathy with the mystical traditions that ecospirituality draws upon, but unlike Gablik, does not affirm them.⁴⁷ Bennett's thesis instead affirms the vitality of matter within an ethical paradigm, acknowledging the importance of a "mood of enchantment" as a contribution towards understanding the function of ethics through an awareness of the complexity of the material world.⁴⁸ Bennett's tales of everyday attentiveness are ones that find the contemporary world, "sprinkled with natural and cultural sites that have the power to 'enchant.'"⁴⁹

An ecofeminist ethics chimes with Paul's sensibility. Implicit within the spiritual content of the art practices of some women, is an earth centred ecological agenda, and an examination of the nature/culture divide which is characteristic of the trajectory of

⁴⁷ Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 91.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

modern thought. A feminist aesthetic also posits a non-hierarchical materiality. Ecofeminist approaches deconstruct traditional patriarchal views of God or the world and in turn reject a dichotomy between the divine and the earth. Matter is affirmed “as alive and relational and demanding respect and interconnection from humans.”⁵⁰ Some feminist scholars, like Debra Koppman, reiterate a panentheist worldview: “What if the spiritual were defined in terms of immanence rather than transcendence? What if physicality were seen as embodying spirituality, rather than as being separate from it?”⁵¹ While this view is certainly not strictly confined to a feminist perspective, it was staked out in early feminist second wave cultural feminism as the traditional notions of a transcendent God were deconstructed. As Koppman argues, feminist, multivalent, and multicultural theoretical approaches to the spiritual in art, might deconstruct entrenched interpretations of that tradition within the western historical system.⁵² While Paul maintained an association with modern subjectivity, her relational poetics can be contextualised within a feminist aesthetics that finds its basis in lived experience, and here, ecological imperatives.

As Paul’s practice emerged within the context of the women’s art movement, it also defines her spiritual sensibility within a feminist purview. Paul’s practice was earthed in her everyday lived experience. This stance was an explicit resistance to the idea of an artist making grand gestures of transcendence. The women’s art movement of the 1970s voiced a position that directly questioned the play of power inherent within the ‘artist as genius’ notion, a trajectory of thought that finds its roots in the nexus of religion, art and philosophy of Romanticism. There was an intentional attempt to disrupt the hierarchical

⁵⁰ Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips “Introduction” in *Post-Christian Feminisms: A Critical Approach*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 7. Isherwood and McPhillips were referring to Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecofeminist Theologies and Ethics: A Post-Christian Movement?” in *Post-Christian Feminisms: A Critical Approach*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 39-52. See also Anne Elvey, “Material Elements: The Matter of Women, The Matter of Earth, The Matter of God,” in *Ibid.*, 53-70. Elvey argues for the reorientation of the term transcendence as “otherness within matter.” *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵¹ Debra Koppman, “Feminist Revisions,” in *Reclaiming the Spiritual in Art: Contemporary cross-cultural perspectives*, ed. Dawn Perlmutter and Debra Koppman (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 53. “A critical component in the construction of feminist redefinitions of the sacred is the rejection of dichotomies which function to isolate humans from their experiences and from the life of the cosmos. The distinction between transcendence and immanence, with the favouring of a perceived spiritual transcendence over a trapped material immanence, is understood as false.” *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵² Koppman, “Thou Art: The Continuity of Religious Ideology in Modern and Postmodern Theory and Practice,” in *Reclaiming the Spiritual in Art*, 156.

and solitary mode of the artist's role through collaboration and multi or interdisciplinary practices. A separatist mode or agenda was a key strategy which helped women artists to foster supportive networks that provided a space to address the personal as political.⁵³ It also supported a space in which to dialogue in order to provide a collective front that was locally and politically contextualised and utterly committed to addressing real world concerns.⁵⁴ Lonie's summary of Paul's sensibility, cited above, affirms her position in this context: "It made possible the reinvention of traditional women's art-forms [and] encouraged the idea of art as a 'practice' – a constant activity but pragmatic, contained within the parameters of daily life."⁵⁵

Yet, without contradiction, Paul remained at arm's length with the feminist movement, and sketched out a phenomenology supported by modern subjectivity. What is clear, was her relationally defined ways of knowing and being in the world that emphasised the significance of an ethical orientation towards material reality. She sought her own way through the literature and worked out a position on the margins of traditions and history. Paul's practice in relation to a spiritual sensibility, finds its locus in her personal life. In this sense, her spiritual sensibility cannot be abstracted from her personal life, or her art. Her work elicits a lived experience in the fullest sense. Given the modern subjectivity that governed her practice, Rahner's notion of the pre-apprehension of being supports a reading of her work: a predilection for living and recording, through her art, transcendental horizons of the divine. In this sense, Paul affirmed a disposition that opened spaces for divine revelation and relation through phenomenological spaces of whiteness delineated by love.

⁵³ In New Zealand, the establishment of the "Spiral Collective" and magazine and the formation of The Women's Gallery in Wellington became solid forums for a collective support network. According to Heather McPherson, the Spiral Collective employed a strategy of "withdrawing from male-supportive roles to find our own properties of strength and charisma." Heather McPherson, "Editorial," in *Spiral* 1 (1976): 2.

⁵⁴ See Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New Press, 1995), 40; Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, "Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 22-23.

⁵⁵ Lonie, "Joanna Paul, a view from here," 26.

The form of apophaticism in Paul's work is not a singular governing theological paradigm. The mystical sensibility of Paul's work and practice finds its basis in a relational poetics. The phenomenology of white space in Paul's work, where she refers to the notion of transcendence directly, is perhaps best expressed in her poem "AFTER CHILDBIRTH:"

I
desired to pass
from confusion of darkness
voices things in a room
full presence of darkness
to
the
simple
passed
through a
white
square
to
to air
to
O

The trajectory of this poem implies a flight towards transcendence. It draws on the classical distinction of darkness versus light, where the analogy of the 'dark night of the soul' has traction. But she does not reside within apophatic darkness. Her work inverts the modernist black monochrome. Considering her oeuvre, this flight to whiteness (inaugurated in the poem above), achieved a semi-permanent status, as she remained with the notion of white in her poetry and painting. In Paul's work, white is interpreted as both a space that delineates particularity, and a phenomenological horizon of being. Subjectivity meets the notion of apophaticism in the way white space for Paul is also

personal space: the way “‘love is alive’ in it.”⁵⁶ As a ‘ground for multiplicity,’ her use of white space supported her whole ethos. So a relational apophaticism here emerges as the defining feature of her notion of white. Reading her allusions to transcendence within her sacramental sensibility, broadly conceived, a form of apophatic panentheism emerges.

To negotiate the connection between Paul’s relational poetics and the apophaticism of white space, Catherine Keller provides some theopoetic assistance. Working within a nexus of theological trajectories – Keller’s early commitment to feminism and process theology, and a “preoccupation with theological cosmology,” – she employs a metaphor for a relational ontology she names “apophatic entanglement.”⁵⁷ In Keller’s recent work, this metaphor “performs its own *coincidentia oppositorum*, a kind of chiasmus between the ancient tradition of negative theology and current planetary materializations of relationalism.”⁵⁸ Here an ethical paradigm that affirms apophatic “nonknowing” and cosmological “nonseparability” meet within a theopoetics which broaches the connection between science and theology, while not abiding within the main stream of the science-religion community.⁵⁹ Her feminist and process theological heritage supports a relationally defined and matter orientated position that aims to foster attention to social, ecological and ethical imperatives, so needed for contemporary engagement with the world.⁶⁰

The apophatic panentheism that Keller espouses is governed by divine love: through this love, transcendence becomes intimacy. Keller’s reference to Charles Stang also has relevance within Paul’s visual poetry: “Eros is the engine of apophasis, a yearning that

⁵⁶ To use a phrase of Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930), 71 in Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (Harrisburg PA: Morehouse, 2005), 166.

⁵⁷ Catherine Keller, “Theology, Science, and *Cloud of the Impossible*,” in *Zygon*, vol. 51, no. 3 (September 2016): 811.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ It is Keller’s hope that the concept of apophatic entanglement, while it “will not solve our ecosocial problems” might “empower some imaginative risk-taking at the edge of the impossible, some instigation of wider and wilder coalitions [or] fresh and emergent coalescences of the dialogue between science and religion.” *Ibid.*, 812.

stretches language to the point that it breaks...”⁶¹ Paul finds solace in white space, when in *scouring* times of the dark night of the soul, white space, as the *pressure* of love, pushes the accoutrements of daily life to the margins. But things are never banished from her view, her writing, or the picture plane. She does not exit the world for some metaphysical plane of existence but maintains an ethics of relational attentiveness to the world.

In Paul’s work the sacramental principle meets a form of panentheism that is relational and apophatic. While the germ of relational theologies emerged contemporaneously with Paul’s practice, the relational apophaticism that Keller espouses is the product of more recent trajectories of thinking. Paul’s engagement with the interface between science and religion was becoming more focused before the time of her tragic death, as she ranged over a variety of texts in support of the need to relate to and maintain the integrity of the natural world. I do not align Paul’s thinking directly with Keller’s schema, but Keller provides language to explain Paul’s disposition as interpreted through her work. If Keller emphasises theopoetics as a method for theology, Paul emphasises art as a method for theopoetics, or exemplifies the use of visual and poetic language as theopoetic.

Paul’s sacramental theology engenders a multiplicity of interpretive approaches. The relationship between definitions of material reality and ensuing relational ontologies is highlighted as a subject of interest for both theological and theoretical *theorising* of artistic practice. Paul’s position on the margins engenders a spiralling of interpretive avenues. Her engagement with a wide range of theological texts for example, provides multiple interpretive departure points. I read these texts as complementary contributions to an understanding of Paul’s practice and sensibility – especially when Paul herself is seemingly opposed to theological compartmentalisation.

The sacramental principle, manifest within a panentheistic worldview, emerges as a primary frame of reference for her relational (theo)poetics. This position is supportive of a notion of enchantment that has ethical implications for being in the world, and

⁶¹ Charles M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: ‘No Longer I’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 170f, in Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 76.

emphasises a relational understanding of the material world that stops short of the grandiose inclinations of Romanticism. Reading Paul's apophatic sensibility within a paradigm that is relationally saturated, ecologically focused and poetically grounded within the intimacies of her everyday life, finds the metaphor of "apophatic entanglement"⁶² an appropriate interpretive window.

⁶² Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 7.

CONCLUSIONS

The spiritual sensibilities of Hotere and Paul show alternative ways of working through the question of the spiritual in art. I conclude that they both emphasise forms of relationality and materiality through their practices that disrupt modern efforts to seek a disembodied spiritual vision of the divine through art. They both engender a form of theopoetics that is not the same as making theological propositions through their art. Theological expression, in a broad sense, is instead embedded within and emerges from their art.

Hotere and Paul between religion and art history

The broader discourse between religion and the arts comes with a multitude of disciplinary assumptions. Each discipline approaches the intersection between art and religion with their own sets of methods, preconceptions and focal points. One of the sticking points in this arena is a perceived need to overcome secular assumptions within art history that inhibit fuller explorations of the discourse of the spiritual in art. But the dialogue between art and religion from the perspective of art historians, religion scholars and theologians also presents overlapping points of consensus with regard to methodology and theory. Stressing the dialogical nature of interdisciplinary work becomes a primary methodological starting point. A self-critical methodology in which neither art historical material nor theology and religious perspectives are overshadowed is affirmed as an appropriate approach.

I chose to ground my study within the artists' works and practices, so that the specificity of their contributions would be privileged over broader theological categories. Both Hotere and Paul exhibit an understated spiritual sensibility in their work. I also wanted to explore their work as gestures of a spirituality that confounded a perceived division between the secular and the sacred. Through close readings of their spiritual sensibilities, multiple interpretive avenues emerged in which to read theological tradition: theology that both worked with the grain of traditional aesthetics as analogous to spiritual experience, and against disembodied or purely subjective iterations of the spiritual in art. Both artists offer ways of approaching and reproaching generalised notions of the spiritual in art, yet through different means. Hotere is indebted to modern art, and Paul more consciously placed herself on the margins of modern art.

I approached the studies of Hotere and Paul with the same basic hermeneutical methodological principle of dialogical exchange. However, the interpretive departure points of each study differed somewhat. I commenced an engagement with Hotere by upholding the interpretive premise of the viewer's position in the analysis of his work. In his case, the tradition of aesthetic contemplation was a primary location in which to explore a connection between art and religion. With Paul, I began from the perspective of her own thoughts about her work and practice. Then I conducted a more integrated interpretation that drew upon wider literature that she herself cited, while also considering the broader contexts of these texts.

In response to the interdisciplinary task of balancing scholarly positions and interpretive perspectives within a study, privileging the particularities of two artist studies did not come without conceptual and structural problems. This approach also brings up questions concerning the nature of interdisciplinarity between religion and the arts. Close readings of Hotere's and Paul's spiritual sensibilities brought to light a multiplicity of topics, departure points, and conceptual paradigms. Through reading and writing along with Hotere and Paul I have hoped to show how the interpretive endeavour can embrace difference. Many of the scholars I have drawn upon for support come from alternative and sometimes vastly different theological or philosophical backgrounds. But each scholar brings valuable insights to the table. My encounter with Hotere's and Paul's work has been implicitly part of the writing process. This process has involved following lines of interpretation that have sometimes spiralled away from the primary texts.

Locating enchantment narratives and the theoretical premise of material religion within Hotere's and Paul's work, contextualises their work within the wider discourse of religion and the arts. Overcoming secular assumptions attached to modern art, and from another perspective, a disembodied notion of the spiritual in art, are both addressed within enchantment narratives and material religion. I also found that questions pertaining to generalised notions of the spiritual in art, and terms like transcendence and immanence that are often employed in art critical writing, can be directly addressed through engagement with the specific studies.

I have not arrived at a single paradigm that explains or contextualises their situation as late modern artists engaged with religion. But I affirm their work as iterations, or evocations, of spiritual sensibilities that find their basis in lived experience as practitioners of art. They both uphold a deeply relational and embodied notion of the spiritual in art. If hermeneutics maintains the idea of “transformation through understanding”¹ reading Hotere and Paul has both revealed the way they engage in this process through their art, which they in turn share with their viewers. Reading their work as theopoetic expressions provides an encompassing hermeneutic that overcomes the sticking point of disciplinary differences.

Ralph Hotere

The main categories for reading Hotere’s spiritual sensibility pertain to his Catholic, modern and Māori heritages. His Catholic heritage emerges in his work through an integrated use of symbolic motifs that speak both to his environmental activism, and traditions of mysticism. Candle lit liturgical allusions can be made through his windows of gold dust and darkness. The dark night of the soul provides a way of reading Hotere’s works as iterations of this location for divine encounter. His spiritual sensibility as read through his modernist heritage emerges in the notion of aesthetic contemplation associated with abstract monochrome painting. Reading Hotere through Reinhardt, Klein and Tàpies reveals the unique contributions of each artist (the way their respective metaphysical schematics are expressed through materiality) as they all present their work as objects for aesthetic contemplation with the goal of transforming consciousness. Hotere’s Māori heritage provides an indigenous spirituality defined by a cosmo-genealogical relational ontology. A material Christianity, meets aesthetic contemplation, meets an indigenous relational ontology in Hotere.

The notion of aesthetic contemplation as analogous with religious experience emerges as a key category in which to explore an intersection with theological aesthetics. The subjective turn within the Romantic definition of aesthetics provides the metaphysical backdrop for the transpositions of spiritual experience, from the domain of institutionalised religion, to the natural world, to abstract art. A foundational theological

¹ Davey, “Hermeneutics and Art Theory,” 439.

aesthetics helps to interpret the embodied existential capacity of the individual to perceive the divine through art. Aesthetic contemplation can be considered a form of mystical knowledge; a preconceptual and experienced form of knowing. The abstract monochrome facilitates this experience as a phenomenological horizon of vision. Yet Hotere's art also provides a broader horizon. He sets the stage for contemplation that expands and refracts this modern aesthetic heritage.

The categories for reading Hotere's spiritual sensibility present alternative understandings of relation to the divine. Conflections between dualist and nondualist spiritual conceptions emerge. Symbolic language and analogy, disembodied or embodied and relational phenomenologies, gather in the process of reading along with Hotere for an understanding of the divine. The different categories of Hotere's spiritual sensibility could be considered as diffractive lenses for each other; multiple interpretations spiral around and through each other.

I argue that Hotere's literary and Māori monochromes redefine ways of thinking through the relation of negative theology to his practice. His works, functioning as aids for a material religion, can be considered as sites for potential divine revelation or encounter. Yet the plurality of Hotere's artistic vision disrupts the metaphysical emphasis on a spiritual vision of transcendent flight towards the Absolute. Hotere's Māori worldview reframes the ontological underpinning of his modernist heritage and the common assumptions attached to the abstract monochrome. His vision is an embodied and relational approach to the spiritual in art. Thus Keller's 'apophatic entanglement' theological metaphor for a relational ontology is an apt one to consider here. Apophatic traditions of "nonknowing" and relationality's "nonseparability," converge in the form of an apophatic panentheism in Hotere's work.²

Reading Hotere's art as expressions of a theopoetic provide an invitation to consider multiple points of view. Marsden's affirmation of the role of the poet as best suited to explaining a Māori worldview, has sympathy with this sensibility. The visual and material qualities of Hotere's work that spiral, reflect and refract light are also visual

² Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, 7.

analogues that help to define the various iterations of spiritual traditions present in his work. In this sense his works also function as visual hermeneutical devices.

Joanna Margaret Paul

Paul's phenomenological approach to the still life sustains a poetics of the everyday. Her spiritual sensibility upholds a relationally instilled pan-sacramentalism. Her relational theology, while contextualised by enchantment narratives, is grounded in her own more conventional interests that would eschew the shamanism that someone like Gablik endorses. Her theological phenomenology or notion of enchantment is ethically motivated and interpreted as a relational understanding of the divine in the world. An apophatic sensibility can be read into her use of white space, supported by her phenomenology, and the wellspring of personal experience. Her work is both apophatic and relational. Here again Keller's metaphor of "apophatic entanglement" that affirms a chiasmus of both unknowing and relationality is apt.³ In this sense, an apophatic contemplative sensibility emerges within Paul's relational poetics.

As a painter/poet of the everyday, Paul sought to communicate a "poetry in things" through her work.⁴ She worked with a heterogenous, emerging and evolving symbolic language coupled with an acknowledgement of an iconography of light as an "enveloping atmosphere" that dismantled the dichotomy of light against dark.⁵

Paul's personal faith found an affinity with the Roman Catholic Christian tradition and Quakerism, and she also found a rich heritage in the Christian mystical traditions to which she could relate. I argue that she outlined a theological phenomenology, or theopoetics, within an experiential sacramental panentheistic worldview. For herself and for the viewer, she fostered a notion of enchantment that communicated an ethical and ecological integrity. This worldview not only saw nature as the location of divine enchantment, but it drew everyday life and sites of domesticity into the frame. Endorsed and supported by the ethos of cultural feminism, her relational poetics also sought an enchantment of everyday life. The house becomes a primary example of a poetics of

³ Ibid., 7.

⁴ Paul, "New Forms in Christian Art," n.p.

⁵ Ibid.

space. Following Bachelard, the painter/poet becomes the phenomenologist. The emphasis is placed on a relation with her objects of study, rather than the rendering of objects in and of themselves. A relational poetics that emphasises friendship with things, becomes ethically transformative.

Paul's *visual poetry* utilises white space, through the balancing of visual excess and restraint. This aesthetic she defined as a form of sacramental theology. Her use of white space can also be read as a container for emotion. For her, the *pressure* of love activates the space. As a form of mediation, her aesthetic 'sacramental theology' is in other words a form of 'religious intuition.' Her use of white space also has a phenomenological capacity for religious experience. White space as a horizon of vision or a horizon of transcendence, is at the same time embedded within a quotidian relationality. As a form of human *kenosis*, a self-emptying contemplative practice can be read as vessel like: in ilk with Paul's symbolism the self can be conceived of as a container for receiving and giving forth love.

For Paul there was also a direct and unmediated form of relation to the things in her world. Paul writes, of painting as an "avenue for empathy," of feeling completed by a "familiar landscape...as much as by [her] face in the mirror."⁶ Paul's practice was for her a way of being in the world: of inhabiting space through visual poetry. Her practice was synonymous with her everyday life. She seemed to epitomise the role of the poet, to cite Viladesau again, as "expressing the existence of things, even the most ordinary, in their variety and uniqueness" and "bringing them to name in human consciousness..."⁷ She liked to quote Hildegard of Bingen's phrase on a "greenness at the heart of creation"⁸ or in an alternative fashion, a "whiteness at the centre,"⁹ which she elaborates upon in her poem "O." "Something about / being / at the centre / of a / big floury rose..." she writes, as she situates herself in nature, and translates the idea into a

⁶ Paul in Paul and Eagle, "Letters from Room to Room," 93.

⁷ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, 154.

⁸ Paul, *Consider the Lily*, n.p.

⁹ Paul, "New Forms in Christian Art," n.p.

compositional process: "...all lines / converge / at the centre / not the middle / but / just outside / the picture / here / O..."¹⁰

Theology emerges in poetic form through reading along with Paul. Reading her 'sacramental theology' alongside her ecological interests, and her association with feminist ethics and aesthetics, forms a theopoetics on the borders of traditions. Poetic process and lived experience form the basis for reading theology along with Paul. The notion of enchantment emerges as an active concept that engenders an ethics of relationality with the world. A poetic 'mood of enchantment' within Paul's attentiveness to everyday life describes a worldview where immanence is valued over transcendent flights towards the Absolute.

Paul's sacramental aesthetics takes a panentheistic form, which in turn can be read as a relational theopoetics. Within this overarching paradigm, an apophatic sensibility is enfolded in her sustained use of white space. This sensibility does not directly ascribe to mysticisms of the dark night, but as a "ground of multiplicity" or "lens of religious intuition,"¹¹ opens a space for relationality. So, a relational apophaticism, or apophatic panentheism, best describes the theological worldview in which Paul situated her practice. If there is a "Christian attitude"¹² to her work, surely it is the governing principle of love that defines an ethics of attentiveness to the world.

Comparing Hotere and Paul

Initial observations of Hotere's and Paul's respective practices reveal that both were consciously immersed in working through the relation between art and everyday life, but each artist approached this relation from a different position. Paul concerned herself with the subject matter of everyday material objects (histories of the personal as political) while Hotere drew from the spiritual tradition of abstraction. Yet the materials Hotere often employed were found objects of the everyday and his practice was an extension of his everyday life. This quotidian focus was combined with the implicit and integrative presence of an indigenous spiritual heritage. Hotere and Paul were both

¹⁰ Paul, "O" in *Like love poems*, 92.

¹¹ Paul in Paul and Eagle, "Letters from Room to Room," 93.

¹² Paul, "New Forms in Christian Art," n.p.

ardent advocates of environmental preservation and activism.¹³ They also were both immersed in the literary art scene and the use of poetry and other literary sources is prevalent across both their oeuvres. Lastly, Hotere's use of black and Paul's use of white as references to the spiritual in art, provide alternative interpretations of a very long tradition of the use of light in art.

Hotere and Paul both work within modernist traditions of the spiritual in art yet bring to bear their own interpretive approaches. Comparing them provides two ways of considering the spiritual in art at this art historical juncture. These two artists can be read as inversions of one another.¹⁴ Hotere employed the colour black in his work to carry the weight of his spiritual sensibility, whereas Paul used white. This comparison is obviously not a racial inflection, even if one artist is Māori and the other New Zealand European. A gender comparison is also obvious, although it is not an explicit differentiation that I make within the studies. That being said, Hotere's work fits within the male dominated histories of the modern abstract monochrome, while Paul infused the significance of everyday life, an implicit feminist stance, with the pathos of white space.

Both artists align most closely with the Roman Catholic tradition. Reading their work through the theological aesthetics of the Catholic tradition is appropriate in the first instance, but it becomes complicated by Hotere's Māori sensibility and Paul's tendency towards panentheism. The presence of indigenous Māori spirituality in Hotere's work and the influence of cultural feminism in Paul's aesthetic are also uncommon areas of enquiry within traditions of theological aesthetics.

Both Hotere and Paul reframe their modernist heritage and affirm a relational and embodied notion of the spiritual in art. Both artists connect with the notion of *tapu* as central to "dynamically interconnected" network of relationships that defines Māori

¹³ Paul connected with Hotere's long association with Aramoana. She contributed to an exhibition project Aramoana at the Wellington City Art Gallery in 1980. A book was made to coincide with the exhibition entitled *Aramoana: tapu land* (Wellington: Wellington City Art Gallery, 1980). The artists involved were, Anna Caselberg, John Caselberg, Jacqueline Frazer, Russell Moses, Di Ffrench, Maarire Goodall, Andrew Drummond, Sean Burdon, Cilla McQueen, O. E. Middleton, Gary Blackman, Jill Hamel, Brian Turner, Shona Rapira, and Joanna Paul.

¹⁴ Bernadette Hall helped me see this relation between them.

consciousness.¹⁵ Both artists also reference the notions of the apophatic in their work. But through their respective artistic iterations, they do not consider the notion of the apophatic as a sense of divine radical otherness, but it is instead inclusive of a relational and embodied connection to material reality. In this sense, Hotere and Paul are two sides of the same coin. Hotere's use of black space, and Paul's use of white space, are interpretive windows into historical traditions of the spiritual in art. Both provide the viewer with horizons of vision, in both the literal and analogous sense. Their respective preferences for black or white space offer paths for considering the tradition of apophatic theology in relation to their work. Hotere's and Paul's respective uses of space can be read as iconographies of light in the tradition of mystical theology. Yet in terms of the theological iconography of light attached to black and white, (darkness and light), they offer opposite points of orientation. Paul's use of white space is a light that pushes darkness from the frame, while Hotere's use of black space is infused with light. Paul dismantles the dichotomy of light against darkness through inhabiting spaces of lightness, as she writes, "whiteness rests my mind."¹⁶ Hotere does so through subsuming darkness and light within the same frame, as "black light."¹⁷ Relationality is found within Hotere's dark canvases, and apophaticism is found within Paul's relational poetics. It could be argued that both Hotere and Paul present two ways of reading the luminous darkness of mystical theology. Hotere presents the more conventional approach, placing emphasis on an unknown transcendence. Paul's approach is one of immanence, where the light of the divine presence is earthbound.

Final thoughts

In conclusion, Hotere and Paul present alternative iterations of the spiritual in art at the end of modernism. Both artists approach notions of the spiritual through the referential

¹⁵ Tate, *He Puna Iti I te Ao Mārama*, 38-40.

¹⁶ From "The Silence of Trees" in *Like Love Poems*, 87. The whole poem is also in "your name" a book of poems and photos. According to Hall, in this collection "the stanzas [are] in the reverse order, [with] a note on the back inside page: 'MALADY – MELODY – THRENODY'." Hall, *Like Love Poems*, 131. This phrase makes a reference to Hotere and Bill Manhire. Through this connection I title my thesis.

¹⁷ The exhibition *Ralph Hotere: Black Light. Major Works Including Collaborations with Bill Culbert* was produced in a partnership between The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. It was curated by Gwynneth Porter, John Walsh and Ian Wedde. Dunedin Public Art Gallery, March-May 2000; Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, June-August 2000; The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, October 2000-February 2001.

space of black or white, and both artists ground this sensibility in the everyday, in language, and in a notion of enchantment that places importance on connectedness to the natural environment and the world. Both artists take alternative routes to essentially affirm the same ethos: the connection between the material and the divine in everyday life. They both infuse a sense of interconnectedness within their respective references to apophatic theology. Both studies can attest to the end of a tradition of seeking a subjective and disembodied union with the Absolute through art (theoesthetics) while retaining a residue of this heritage. Modernist iterations of the spiritual in art can be read through both Hotere's deferral to the abstract monochrome, and Paul's iconography of light. The subjective turn in seeking the divine in nature, transposed within the frame of an artwork, is both acknowledged and metaphysically reinterpreted through their work.

Overcoming the demarcation of philosophy (as secular) and theology (as religious) is not my thesis, but what these artists do is present multiple avenues that speak of multiple ways of disabling metaphysical and ontological divisions. Paul maintains a secular position but affirms a religious attitude; she works through an understanding of modern subjectivity in relation to divine transcendence yet disrupts this notion with a turn to immanence as "an enveloping atmosphere,"¹⁸ a denial of the self, and a relationality endorsed by cultural feminist critique. Hotere's multiplicity also speaks to a non-localised discursiveness. These artists help us to see that there is no natural demarcation between the secular and the religious in lived experience.

Reading Hotere's and Paul's contributions as forms of theopoetic language emphasises a method for theology that chimes with the heterogeneous expressions of theology in Paul and Hotere. A theopoetic sensibility emphasises poetic expression over systematic specifics and traditional metaphysics. It affirms creative practice, embodied poetics and lived experience as valid sources for doing theology. Multiple perspectives and nondogmatic expressions of faith are permitted within this view. Through their art, Hotere and Paul delineate sites of relation with the divine in the world. Their ecological and political interests become enfolded within their theopoetics as they also seek to engage in productive and transformative dialogue with their viewers.

¹⁸ Paul, "New Forms in Christian Art," n.p.

Regarding the study of art and religion more generally, reading-along-with Hotere and Paul has unearthed idiosyncratic religious and spiritual perspectives that dismantle generalisations about the nature of the spiritual in art. Rather than attempt to fix their perspectives within theological categories, through reading-along-with Hotere and Paul I traced the contours of two complementary spiritual sensibilities that valued difference in dialogue, otherness in relation, and apophatic entanglement.

Systematic theology and art history might be “rum companions,” to use a phrase of Elkins,¹⁹ but not in the sense that individual belief complicates any legitimate enquiry between religion and art. The study of Hotere’s and Paul’s spiritual sensibilities, reveals the ways their visions as artists dwell within strange spaces that do not pay heed to systematic theological specifics. Delineating a systematic theology of art cannot be broached through art itself, for the visual iterations of their concerns are multiple and open, and their religious affiliations rest upon the margins of traditions. What emerges as a central theological interpretive context is instead the way Hotere’s and Paul’s work and practice present a form of theopoetics *as* art.

¹⁹ Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*, 115.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1

Ralph Hotere, *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, 1996,
acrylic and gold leaf on glass, 1010 x 940 mm, collection unknown,
image reproduced by permission of the Hotere Foundation Trust.

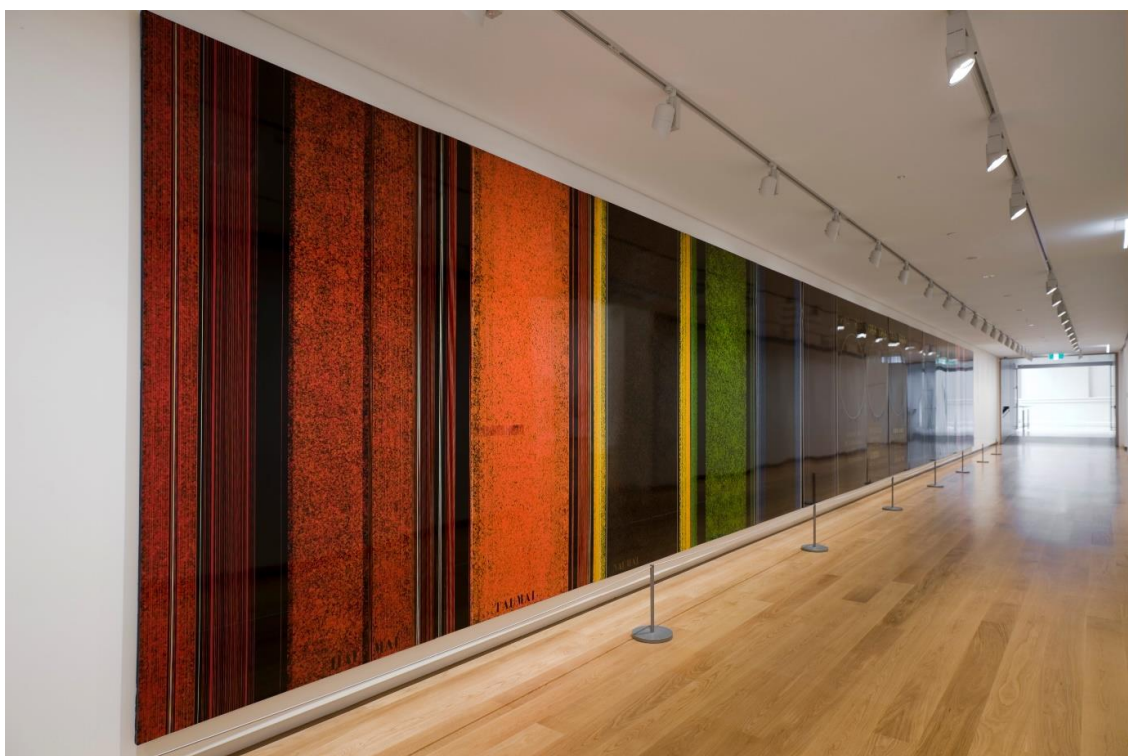


Fig. 2

Ralph Hotere, *Godwit/Kuaka*, 1977, 2400 x 18000 mm,
lacquer on hardboard, Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of
Auckland International Airport Ltd., 1997,
image reproduced by the permission of the Chartwell Trust.



Fig. 3

Ralph Hotere, *Kyrie Eleison 3 (Requiem Series)*, 1974,
acrylic on canvas, 1260 x 1260 mm, presented by Mrs C. S. Hamilton, 1982,
Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetū,
image reproduced by permission of the Hotere Foundation Trust.



Fig. 4
Ralph Hotere, *Opatae*, 1989,
stainless steel, torched and ground, rivets, 1070 x 1215 mm, collection unknown,
image reproduced by permission of the Hotere Foundation Trust.



Fig. 5

Ralph Hotere, *Les Saintes Maries De La Mer*, 1984,
stainless steel, window frame, 875 x 780 mm, Roger Hickin and Glyn Abbott
Collection, image reproduced by permission of the Hotere Foundation Trust.

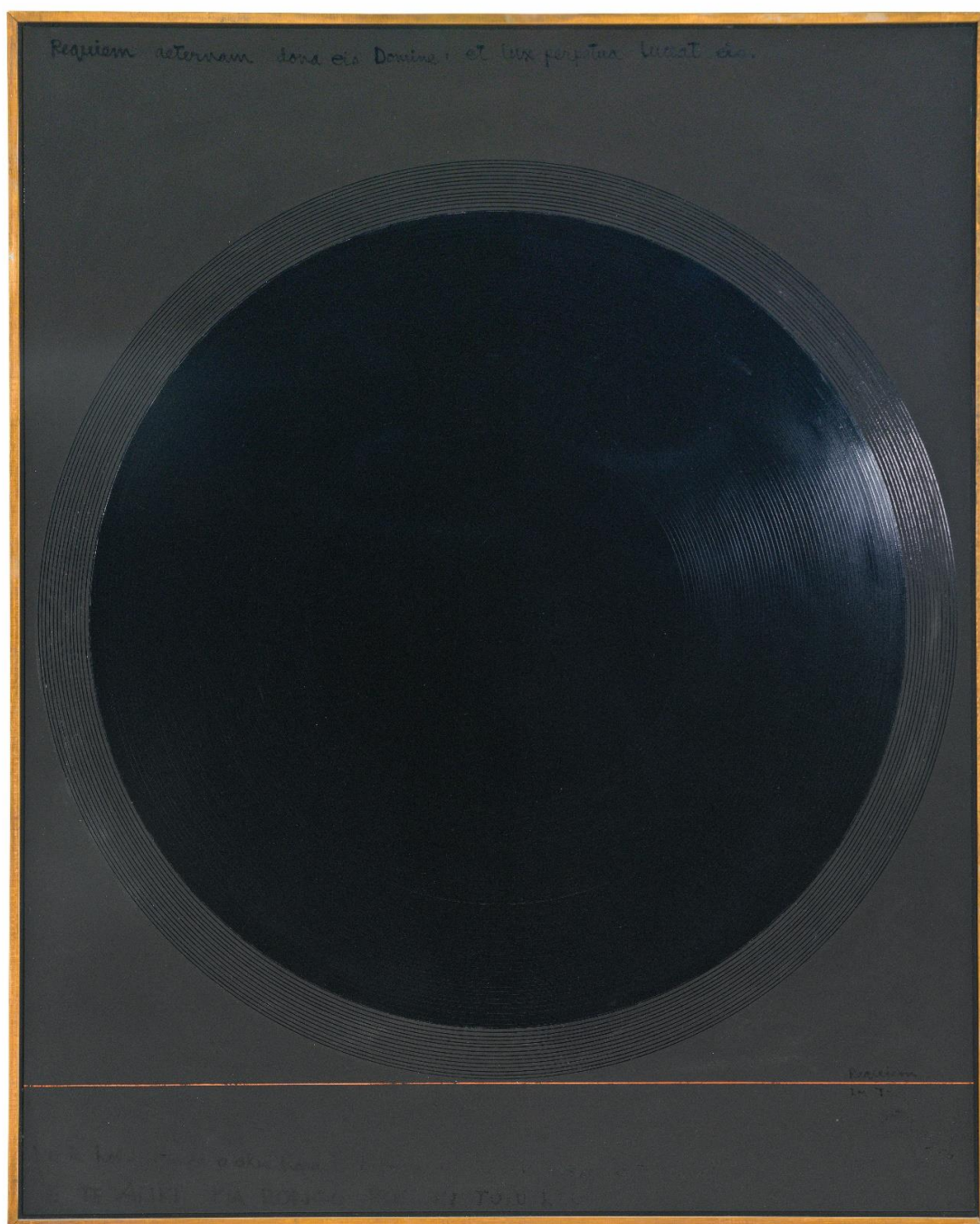


Fig. 6

Ralph Hotere, *Requiem for Tony*, 1974,
lacquer on hardboard, 1520 x 1220 mm, Paris Family Collection,
image reproduced by permission of the Hotere Foundation Trust.

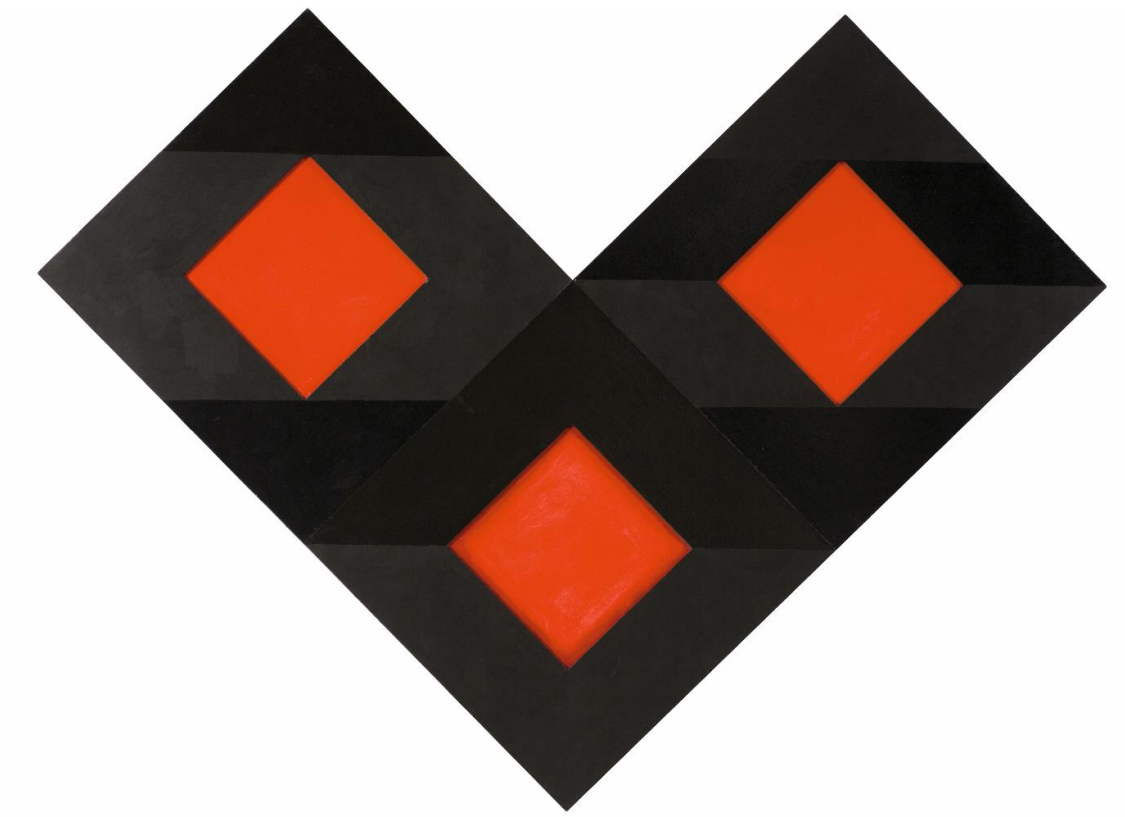


Fig. 7

Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting* [from *Human Rights* series], 1964, acrylic on board, 1220 x 1700 mm, collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, image reproduced by permission of the Hotere Foundation Trust.



Fig. 8

Ralph Hotere, *Black Phoenix*, 1984-88,
burnt wood and metal, 5000 x 12900 x 5650 mm,
collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa,
image reproduced by permission of the Hotere Foundation Trust.



Fig. 9

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Untitled* [still life with roses], 1994, pencil and gouache on paper, 270 x 277 mm, collection unknown, image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 10

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Untitled* [The Stillness of the rose...], 1974-1980, pencil, coloured pencil and watercolour on paper, each 260 x 180 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 11

Frances Hodgkins, *Self Portrait: Still Life*, c. 1935, oil, 762 x 635 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1963.



Fig. 12

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Self Portrait / Still Life*, 1999,
pencil, coloured pencil on paper, 400 x 290 mm,
collection of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate,
image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.

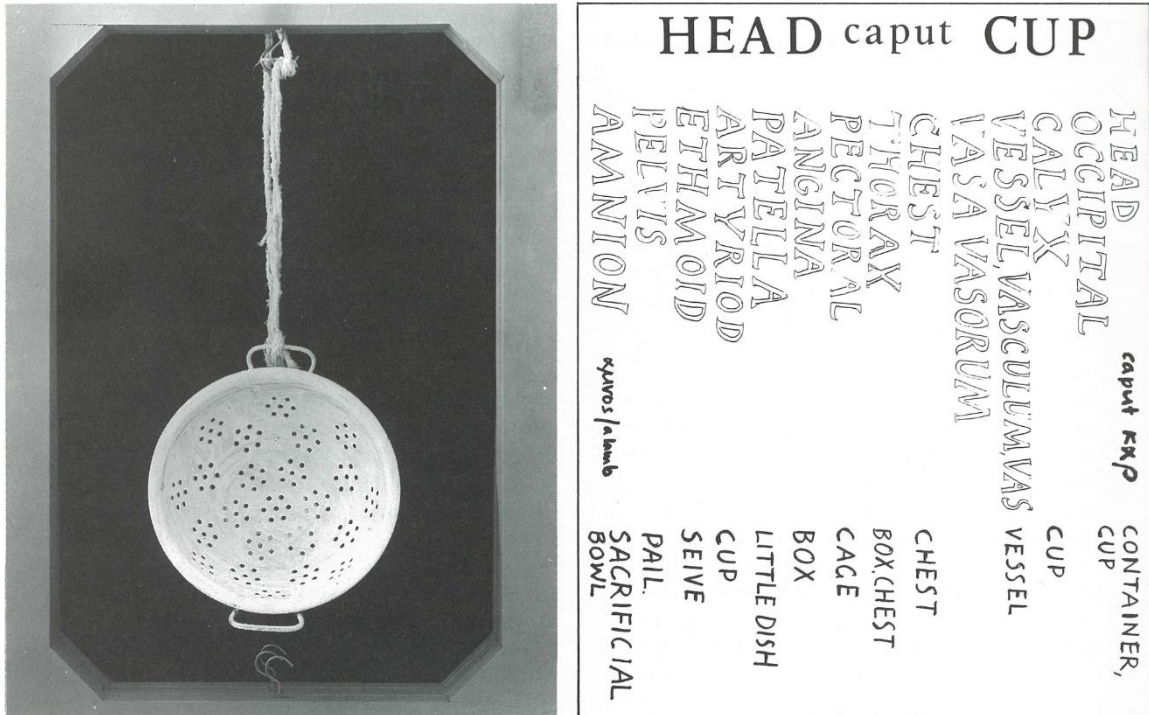


Fig. 13

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Unwrapping the body, artists book* [HEAD caput CUP] c. 1978,
Bothwell, Dunedin,
image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 14

NUCLEUS, nut, NUT from *UNPACKING the body*, 1996,
presented by Alan Loney, 2009, mixed media, 297 x 210 mm,
image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 15

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Stations of the Cross*, [10-12 from right to left], c. 1970-1971, gesso on wooden panels, St Mary Star of the Sea, Port Chalmers, Dunedin, image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 16

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Still life*, (date unknown),
ink and watercolour on paper, 237 x 160 mm,
collection of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate,
image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 17

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Untitled (Barrys Bay)*, 1976 / 2013,
archival pigment print (edition of 3), 175 x 260 mm, Robert Heald Gallery,
image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.

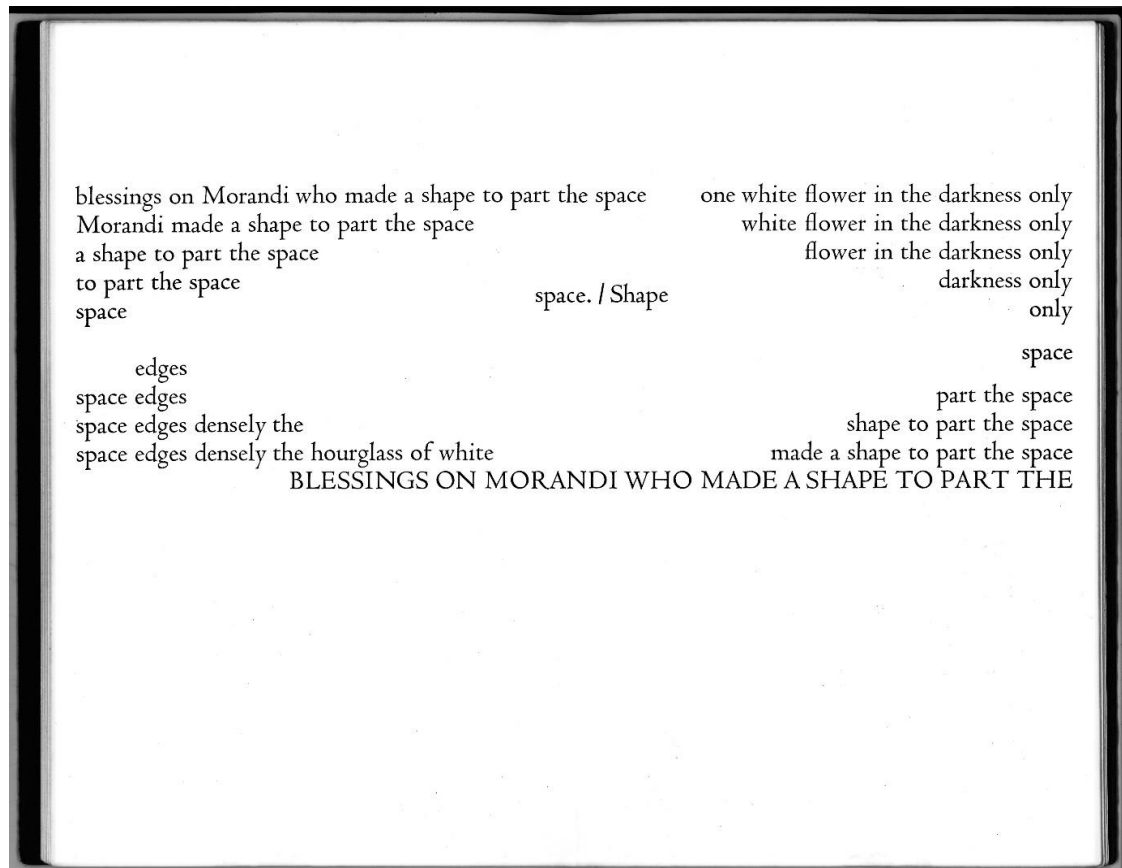


Fig. 18

Joanna Margaret Paul, 'blessings on Morandi,' *Imogen*, Hawk Press, 1978,
image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 19

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Two Pears*, date unknown, gouache on paper
210 x 297 mm, collection of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate,
image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 20

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Frugal Pleasures* [Still life with statuette and Latin text], 1999, gouache and watercolour on paper, 313 x 352mm, David and Keren Skegg Deposit, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, L2011/43, image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 21

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Frugal Pleasures* [Still life with apples and plums on a tray, with Latin text], 1999, gouache and watercolour on paper, 319 x 403mm, David and Keren Skegg Deposit, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, L2011/46, image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 22

Joanna Margaret Paul, *On Roundness*, 1984,
ink, watercolour, pencil and collage, private collection,
image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 23

Joanna Margaret Paul, *Dante's Rose and the Sublunary Wardrobe*, 2002
 chalk pastel, (Photocopied frieze), private collection,
 image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Fig. 24

Joanna Margaret Paul, *In-Carnation*, date unknown,
pencil and coloured pencil, 495 x 245 mm, private collection,
image reproduced by permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.

